

Educational and Practical Experience for a good while the Junior Faculty Development Program (JFDP) 2006-2007

When I set out to find the JFDP, I was primarily looking to study abroad; I had decided that while I like research and training research skills in the field of the Library and Archive Science.

For me, it was the time (from December 6, 2006 to May 23, 2007) of immense professional and personal growth. From the very beginning, I had a feeling that my days were too short: auditing wonderful courses, working on projects, reading at the library, having coffee with colleagues, talking to students, going to conferences, writing, training, exploring ... At the time, it seemed I had too much on my plate, and that it would be better to concentrate on two or three things. With the hindsight, I guess I could not and should not have behaved differently. That was the time of my life, and I am happy I made the best of it. I learned an unbelievably lot of things from informed, challenging and insightful interactions with American colleagues. Last but not least, I also learned how to make the best of my diverse academic and professional interests, how to blend them to the benefit of my training and research.

The purpose of my fellowship is to take a broad look at the current state of deployment of Information Competency (IC) in the academic sector in the USA, to explore how university policies and strategies were shaping this deployment and back home to implement received skills for developing and recommending Information Competency policy integrated into the curriculum which facilitate the effective uses of learning resources and instructional technology at Khazar University.

My professional goals:

- receive knowledge for my growth professionally;
- explore teaching skills and techniques, educational methods at the University of Iowa;
- expand the information base in the fields of Librarianship;
- develop on-going contact and exchange between home and host institutions

Some Facts about the University of Iowa

The University of Iowa is a major national research university located on a 1,900-acre campus in Iowa City in southeast Iowa, on the Iowa River. Iowa is composed of 11 colleges, the largest of which is the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, enrolling most of Iowa's undergraduates. The Henry B. Tippie College of Business, the Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of Medicine, and the Colleges of Education, Engineering, Law, Nursing, Pharmacy, enroll undergraduates, and with the Colleges of Dentistry and Public Health provide graduate education in conjunction with the Graduate College.

More than 29,000 students enroll at Iowa each year. Some 64 percent come from Iowa, 21 percent from adjoining states, and 8 percent from the remaining states. International students from 109 countries make up 7 percent of the University's enrollment. The faculty numbers about 1,700 and there are about 13,000 staff. The total annual operating budget is about \$2.1 billion, and there are more than 120 major buildings, most of them within walking distance of one another. Adding to the population are more than a million visitors each year who come to enjoy cultural events and art exhibits, to attend Big Ten athletic events, and to participate in the many conferences and educational programs scheduled at the University year-round.

In the springs and summers, Iowa City sponsors weekly downtown jazz and pop concerts, and all through the year major poets, writers, artists, historians, scientists, and others speak or perform in University venues or to read at local bookstores. Excellent public schools, close, safe, and comfortable neighborhoods, and a highly educated population mean that Iowa City frequently appears high on “best-place-to-live” listings in national magazines. The nearby countryside, good state parks, and the Iowa River provide many opportunities for walking, biking, and boating.

History

Established in 1847, Iowa has won international recognition for its wealth of achievements in the arts, sciences, and humanities. Iowa was the first U.S. public university to admit men and women on an equal basis and the first institution of higher education in the nation to accept creative work in theater, writing, music, and art as theses for advanced degrees. It established the first law school and the first educational radio station west of the Mississippi, broadcast the world's first educational television programs, and developed and continues to hold preeminence in educational testing.

The University of Iowa Libraries is the largest library system in Iowa and 18th in collection size among U.S. research libraries. The University's Main Library, Hardin Library for the Health Sciences, 10 branch libraries, and the Law Library contain more than 4 million volumes. About two-thirds of this collection resides in the Main Library.

Study at the School of Library and Information Science

School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) of the University of Iowa was a good base for me to creating knowledge and transferring that knowledge to mutual practical benefit. My decision to sign up for four the SLIS courses sent me off down a road of adventure and change, and more importantly, opened up a new, exciting world.

My studies included coursework in reference, online information retrieval, managing electronic resources/services (Course “Reference and Information Service”), real-world opportunity to employ my academic and professional interests around improvements to the EGranary digital library, information networking, an innovative program that serve the information poor in the developing countries and the U.S (“Seminar in Library & Information Science”), the effective use of the library research in the appropriate academic discipline (“Library Research in Context”), creating my professional portfolio by making of self-examination, comparison to standards, personal assessment (“Capstone”). The different courses exposed me to new ways of thinking and new ways of approaching what I already- as I considered- knew.

Another direction I have moved was the participation in WiderNet project to improve the quality of the eGranary Digital Library (<http://www.widernet.org/digitallibrary/>) and facilitate its widespread distribution to my home institution. I have found two ways of the potential activities: to promote the eGranary within Khazar University and use the content of the eGranary to develop course curriculum at home institution in the field of Information Competency.

The promise of ICT attracts my home institution from across classes, marshalling their interest in a way that will facilitate connections and interaction among Khazar University community to promote flows of information and knowledge, creation of ideas and digital initiatives.

This initiative will develop to respond to the following challenges faced by Khazar University:

- It is striving to respond more effectively to the educational and development problems facing his community.
- Development the communication and information technology that can enhance students' more understanding of course content.
- Increasing university's capacity for understanding, teaching and training on eGranary Digital Library in education.
- Training for university faculty and local teachers in the use the content available in the eGranary digital library and its off line potential via implementation intranet between home university & affiliated branches.

Cooperation between the WiderNet Project and Khazar University has started. I signed Memorandum of Understanding between the Widernet Project and Khazar University. Khazar University will provide a copy of the eGranary Digital Library via a hard drive that I have received as a subscriber.

Special Project

Training skills and library research finally grew together in my special project which focuses on providing information literacy instruction to students at home institution.

I think that Information literacy is not only a set of skills but also the vision that comes with experience in finding, evaluating and using information. This is the most obvious link with lifelong learning: that we continually learn from experience. The teaching and learning challenge for Khazar University Library is therefore double: to make the experience of finding information valuable both for the immediate need and for the future. Library staff will support learning and are actively involved in teaching, researching and evaluating information literacy programmers throughout the University system.

I see the best way to ensure that students have the skills that they need is to design an information literacy program integrated into the curriculum and built on strong alliances between classroom faculty and library faculty.

It's clear that comprehensive information literacy instruction is a necessary part of today's university curriculum, and much work is being done by educators and librarians to incorporate this instruction across the entire span of university courses.

The aim of the Information Competency course is to equip undergraduate students with information skills that they could apply to the research component of their graduate course and to satisfy future information requirements. Fundamental to the course design is a definition of information literacy, which includes the recognition of a need for information, the importance of organizing information so that it can be readily retrieved, the ability to evaluate information obtained and to apply critical thinking skills.

This course will be tailored to the students' fields of interest, namely Economics & Management, Medicine education, although the content of the course material will be generic. Therefore examination will be by means of a portfolio, which each student builds during the semester, and included specific activities, exhibiting the student's efforts and progress, encouraging them to become independent.

Specific feature of the course is no textbook is required. All necessary materials will be available online or using content of the eGranary Digital Library. Information about this project now is available via Internet <http://www.jfdp.org/activityDetail.php?id=517>

I see this syllabus as a main part of more global Joint project between the University of Iowa and Khazar University related to design International Information Literacy Portal.

Professional and other Activities

In addition to my regular classes' responsibilities, I participated in both professionally- and personally - oriented activities by attending and presenting at University-based conferences, teaching seminars or by serving as community volunteer.

- I took part in 8th Crossing Borders Convocation "The Vulnerabilities of Labor Migrants" April 5-7th, 2007 under the University of Iowa International Programs. An annual Convocation serves as a forum for the presentation of research by UI faculty and students and by distinguished scholars from our University and other universities.

- I participated weekly in International Mondays under the University of Iowa International Programs

- I prepared the following Power Point Presentations:

- √ "Labor Migrants in Azerbaijan" for International Community. April 17, 2007

- √ "Professional Portfolio for Career Development" for the School of Library and Information Science faculty. April 20, 2007

- √ "Activities within the Widernet Project" for Seminar in Library and Information Science. May 9, 2007.

I participated in several workshops, seminars, library exhibitions, English classes under International Women's Club, Immigration Orientation Session organized by the Office of International Students and Scholars of the University of Iowa.

A special attention was paid cultural events, such as 10th DVIP Souper Bowl - The domestic Violence Intervention Program, Slavic Bazar, Asian Heritage Festival, Music and Dancer festivals, etc.

The JFDP program has been not disappointing. Not only I find every aspect of it to be an exciting and challenging growth opportunity, it will also consistently complement my work as a trainer, library information specialist at the Khazar University. As a result, not only I will be trained information professional, but I also will be a much more effective leader within my professional community.

The time I spent in the U.S. as a JFDP fellow was by far the most eventful, most thrilling and most productive period of my life. I feel I've developed significantly, not only in terms of my professional expertise but also in the sense that I've blossomed to fuller maturity, discovering- if I may say- incredible potentials at the core of my being. Having lived and studied in various different parts of America, I completed my voyage from the unknown and uncertain, through to the evolution of my own identity and the emergence of an even greater self-esteem that I feel now.

I am forever thankful for everything the American Councils staff in Washington D.C. and Baku have done for me and helped me with.

Tatyana Zaytseva

Library Information Center, Director