

**U.S. Embassy Dushanbe Alumni Newsletter
Issue # 1, April 2008**



The U.S. Embassy presents:

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| May 15, 2008 | Movie: Seabiscuit, 2:30 p.m., American Corner, Dushanbe. A discussion will follow the screening. |
| June 23-30, 2008 | Poetica Musica Concerts in Dushanbe: Poetica Musica is a consortium of musicians who are currently Artists-in-Residents at Old Westbury Gardens, a stately mansion located on Long Island's North Shore. |
| June 2-16, 2008 | Artist Martha Jackson Jarvis Visits Tajikistan: Martha Jackson Jarvis is a painter and sculptor from the Washington, D.C. area. She will teach a variety of workshops and exhibitions during her stay in Dushanbe. |

WELCOME TO THE FIRST ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

We are happy to present the first of many alumni newsletters, produced by the Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy in Dushanbe. Given our alumni's achievements, progress, and highly developed capability, this network functions as a social engine in Tajikistan. Our alumni are change agents, and putting their knowledge and skills into practice will contribute to the betterment of society. Hence, the U.S. Embassy in Tajikistan feels strongly about the development and coordination of its alumni network. In the years ahead, alumni programs will be at the forefront of the mission's strategy.

A MESSAGE FROM THE CULTURAL AFFAIRS OFFICER



Welcome to the first issue of our quarterly alumni newsletter. We hope that this publication keeps all of you updated on the activities of your fellow alumni and inspires you to start your own activities here in Tajikistan. There are more than one thousand alumni of our various programs living in Tajikistan.

This newsletter is the first step in our renewed effort to engage our alumni. Many of you have already met Marhabo Jonbekova, our new grants and alumni coordinator. Marhabo is extremely energetic and eager to work with all of you. I encourage you to contact her or I directly with any ideas and updates on your life. Marhabo will be working to expand out activities, which will include conferences, receptions and speaker programs targeted at alumni. Please let her know if you have an idea for an event, and we will do our best to make it happen. I also want to encourage you to come to the Embassy and use our Information Resource

Center, which has a wealth of English-language books and materials, as well as Internet access. If you live outside of Dushanbe, please visit our American Corners, located in Khujand and Kulob. We are planning to open two additional American Corners this year.

We are so proud of all of your accomplishments and happy to have you in our "family" of U.S. government alumni. I've really enjoyed meeting many of you, and I hope to meet you all before I leave Tajikistan.

Sincerely,
Anne Benjaminson

MUSKIE CELEBRATES 15 YEARS IN TAJIKISTAN



On December 18, Ambassador Jacobson hosted a reception for alumni of the Muskie program to celebrate 15 years of Muskie in Tajikistan. The Ambassador opened the event by praising the achievements of the Muskie alumni and encouraging them to continue to be active in their work in Tajikistan. Shohin Rizoiev (Muskie 2003) and Malika Baimatova (Muskie 2005) spoke of their experiences and praised the program for deepening their understanding of America. Attendees took advantage of the networking opportunity and agreed to strengthen Muskie's local alumni association.

ALUMNI OF THE MONTH



In February, Bakhityor Isoev was named the U.S. Department of State's Alumni Member of the Month. Bakhtiyor is the first-ever alumnus from Tajikistan to receive the award. Bakhtiyor received a congratulatory letter from U.S. Ambassador Tracey Jacobson. Isoev, a 2007 UGRAD alumnus, traveled to the United States to study International Relations and Area Studies at Lees McRae College. Upon his return to Tajikistan in 2007, Isoev took a strong leadership role in Khujand. Isoev has raised the profile of exchange programs and their alumni while benefiting the community. He has also united the alumni community, and inspired Khujand alumni to further engage the community in the future. Currently, Isoev works at the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) Education Programs Division, where he is responsible for the recruitment, selection, orientation and alumni retention of various English- language programs. During his spare time, Isoev enjoys composing poems and stories in English and Russian, as well as reading foreign literature.

ALUMNI HELP OUT DURING ROUGH WINTER

By Nicolas Destch, IREX Country Director

On February 16, IREX organized a roundtable discussion at the American Corner for alumni to discuss the energy crisis in Tajikistan. Suffering from the severest winter in decades, the majority

of Tajikistan was left without electricity during the coldest winter months. IREX invited Daler Irmatov, Financial and Procurement Manager for the Ministry of Energy, to discuss the energy situation in Tajikistan. Daler discussed his participation in the World Bank financed “Energy Loss Reduction Project”, and gave a Power Point presentation of the project findings and achievements of the project. Daler’s presentation was followed by a roundtable discussion with various students and alumni of programs including UGRAD, Muskie, FLEX and Contemporary Issues. A group of UGRAD and Muskie alumni stayed after the event to discuss the possibility of initiating a donation drive for people in the regions suffering from the electricity cuts. Bakhtiyor Isoev (UGRAD 2006), Adiba Karimi (Muskie 2006), Noor Umarov (Muskie 1994), Valijon Ranoev (UGRAD 2005) and Veronika Razikova (UGRAD 2004) decided to initiate a donation drive to help those people in need.



The alumni used the Internet to send out announcements to organizations, Embassies, businesses and students. Alumni handed out paper copies of the flyer announcing the drive to their neighbors, universities and international organizations. Nisso Rahmonova (Muskie 2002) also helped distribute the announcement using various contacts, including alumni of British exchange programs. Madina Mamadsafoeva (UGRAD 2006) collected donations at her place of work, AIESEC, in Dushanbe. Another alumni, Tahmina Fayzullaeva (UGRAD 2001) who has been living in the

Czech Republic for the last several years, sent a donation through her mother, showing that even those alumni that leave Tajikistan continue to support their compatriots. The donation drive also received some unexpected publicity when the First Russian Channel came to the IREX office and filmed the initiative. The report was broadcast throughout the Former Soviet Union on February 22. When the alumni Bakhtiyor Isoev (UGRAD 06), Adiba Karimi (MUSKIE 06), Valijon Ranoev (UGRAD 05), Veronika Razikova (UGRAD 04), Nadejda Sosnina (UGRAD 05) and Rasul Salomov (Muskie 1996) gathered to sort the donations on February 29, Mir Television filmed the event and will broadcast it throughout Eurasia on March 2. Alumni planned to deliver the donations to the Center for the Blind and Disabled in Vahdat on March 1st.

ROUNDTABLE ON THE ROLE OF ALUMNI IN TAJIKISTAN’S DEVELOPMENT

On November 17, a group of alumni from various international study abroad programs attended a roundtable discussion focused on finding ways to make alumni in Tajikistan take a more active role in civil society. The round table was moderated by Regional Scholar Exchange Program and Fullbright fellow Alla Aslitdinova and included Noor Umarov (Muskie 1994) and Tojinnisso Rahmanova (Muskie 2002). The alumni supported a lively discussion and exchanged ideas and experiences from their time studying abroad. The participants discussed various methods of strengthening the alumni community including the idea of establishing an alumni association. The round table also delved into subjects like readjusting to life after coming home, the lack of an active civil society in Tajikistan and the question of isolation of alumni from community groups after returning home from abroad.

PARVINA ADYLOVA MOBILIZES UGRAD ALUMNI TO HELP DUSHANBE ORPHANAGE



During December and January, IREX intern Parvina Adylova and UGRAD alumni implemented a drive to collect donations for Orphanage #1 in Dushanbe. The drive reached out to individual donors, international organizations and local agencies. By the end of January a sizeable amount of clothes, toys, money and even a stroller had been collected. On January 26, Parvina, Veronika Razikova (UGRAD 2004), Malika Jurakulova (UGRAD 2004), Valijon Ranoev (UGRAD 2005) and Bakhtiyor Isoev (UGRAD 2006) gathered the donations together and headed to the orphanage., where they organized various games and activities for the children. One group of the younger children were taken from the orphanage to watch a cartoon at a nearby movie theatre. The rest of the children were entertained by the alumni and received new clothes and toys from the donation drive. The entertainers soon changed places though, as the children recited poems and sang songs for the alumni. Both alumni and orphans enjoyed the meeting and the UGRAD alumni expressed their interest in continuing such initiatives in the future.

ROUNDTABLE ON THE HISTORY OF THE TAJIK CIVIL WAR AND THE PEACE PROCESS

On January 7th, Gulru Nabieva (UGRAD 2004) organized a roundtable discussion at the IREX-administered IATP center on the Tajik Civil War in her home town of Khujand. Juma Niyazov, the deputy chairman of the Democratic Party of Tajikistan, was invited to give a presentation about the civil war years as well as the resulting peace process. Mr. Niyazov participated in multiple rounds of the peace process as an official negotiator between the government and opposition leaders that took place from March 1994 to June, 1997. Niyazov gave a 30-minute presentation that began with the roots of the war and ended with the Peace Accord. The presentation was attended by UGRAD and FLEX alumni as well as other students with an interest in learning more about the Tajik Civil War. Upon the conclusion of the presentation the participants asked Niyazov questions and discussed the factors behind the war as well as democracy and civil society in Tajikistan. The round table was especially important for Gulru, who is currently studying for her master's degree at the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, and has taken great interest in the impact of the civil war on Tajikistan: "I found out that most of the Tajik people know very little about it," she says. "For me, in order to understand what is going on in Tajikistan now, we have to look back into history."

U.S. EMBASSY STAFF TRAIN FLEX ALUMNI IN PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Marhabo Jonbekova and Abdulmalik Kadirov, from the U.S. Embassy Public Affairs Section held a two-hour seminar on project design for FLEX Alumni at American Councils on January 31, 2008. The first session of the seminar-presentation focused on project design. In the second session of the seminar participants were introduced to the U.S. Embassy Alumni Grant process. Participants engaged in a debate and discussions about realistic themes for the project proposal.

Embassy staff handed out alumni grant application forms and guideline as well as material on project design.

ALUMNUS INCORPORATES MINI-GRANT PROJECT INTO TAJIK NATIONAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM



As part of a Citizen Exchanges grant supporting active and responsible Citizenship, Farkhod Ulugov developed a detailed action plan during his Legacy International U.S. residency program in fall 2007. Ulgov is a member of Legacy International's Central Asia Team, which is dedicated to strengthening civil society, linking cultures and providing tools for individuals and organizations to resolve worldwide conflicts. Once back in his home country, Ulgov developed a mini-grant under this award to develop a "Life Skills" curriculum focused on the importance of active and responsible citizenship. Buoyed by his U.S. experience, Ulgov presented the curriculum plan to representatives of the Ministry of Education and UNICEF and received both political and financial support.

HARD WORK AND OPTIMISM ARE AT THE HEART OF THE LONG-LASTING FRUITFUL RESULTS

By Adiba Karimi, Muskie 2006



In 2006, I received the Edmund Muskie scholarship. The scholarship enabled me to study at Kennesaw State University (KSU) in the United States, where I obtained post-graduate certificate. This one year of study in the U.S. has made a significant difference in my personal and professional life. I left KSU with great experiences and memories. Today I am back in my country and currently working for Project HOPE as a Coordinator for the Healthy Family Project. The skills that I have learned in the United States are extremely useful in my professional work. I share my understanding of American education, culture, life and customs with people here. Many think that it is impossible to get a scholarship and to study in the US nepotism. I encourage and hope to influence those who have negative thoughts and those who are financially not able to attend.

Tajikistan is a poor country and has too little opportunity for young people to break the chain of destitution and hopelessness. A wise person once said that we should grab the opportunities we are given. This advice has become the source of my motivation and taught me to try hard and finish with devotion every work or activity I start.

I appreciate the opportunity to attend KSU, where I realized that everybody can make a positive change in this world. Through the classes that I attended, communicating with the teaching staff, presentations, meeting students of different nationalities and interacting with administrative staff I learned new possibilities, advanced my knowledge and developed my understanding and thinking skills. I understood that my role is to start helping and inspire others in Tajikistan.

MY U.S. EXPERIENCE

By Larisa Dodkhudoeva, Fulbright 2007



My personal story as a Fulbright visiting scholar was positive throughout the program. The program at Rutgers University was in line with my interests. The Ruth Center for Gender Study at Rutgers University provided me a great opportunity to attend a number of lectures on gender in art. I had numerous discussions with American scholars as well as experts of different women's centers at Rutgers and Princeton Universities. I have been acquiring visual resources in the form of slides and publications at the New York Public Library, Princeton University Library, and the Alexander and Art History libraries at Rutgers University. I have also examined scientific literature in the private collections of my colleagues. A good deal of material had thus far been collected. I took part in many conferences and seminars on gender balance in culture.

I gave a talk on "Gender and Women in Contemporary Tajik Art" in the art department of Rutgers University and prepared a few articles for academic journals. The first article, "Gender Issues in Tajikistan," will be published in English in the academic journal "Studies on Persian Societies." I am also planning to publish a monograph dedicated to gender and women in contemporary Tajik art.

Being a Fulbright scholar is very prestigious. I understood it during my fellowship. This status gave me the confidence of my American colleagues and contacts with different intellectuals. I was able to access any library or scientific center. I really enjoyed my status as a Fulbright visiting scholar.

I was able to develop good communication between the College of New Jersey and Technological University of Tajikistan. In the near future, these institutions might sign an agreement for student exchange. In autumn, a student from the College of New Jersey will visit Tajikistan to study language and history. Young English teachers will be eligible for scholarships at the College in the future.

This summer, two of my colleagues will come to Tajikistan to do research on sacred places and contemporary art of Tajikistan. Their host institution will be the Tajik Academy of Sciences. In general, the American environment and its people were very friendly.

IN THE UNITED STATES...

MY EXPERIENCE WITH CULTURE SHOCK

By Lola Rahimbekova, JFDP 2007- 2008



Every person who has lived in a new culture has had experience with culture shock, and I am no exception. Although I have lived in the United States for three months, sometimes I still feel homesick and still miss my family. When I first came to the United States, I was very excited because everything was new and interesting. I enjoyed independence from my parents. I also enjoyed experiencing new situations and making new friends. Eventually I got used to many differences, but even though I was used to them, I still was not comfortable. In fact, little by little I grew tired of the differences because things weren't new to me anymore and the differences were not interesting. Indeed, they had actually become boring. As a result, I began to miss things about my home country, such as food, clothes, the warm climate, friends and family

more and more. I soon became depressed and homesick, stayed home most of time. I was tired of everything around me and sometimes even of speaking English.

Even though I studied hard, my grades weren't good. The only thing I wanted was to go home. I decided to see my advisor, for advice on returning home without finishing my program. My advisor, who is a very smart and supportive person, told me two important things about culture shock.

First, I learned that any person in a new culture has a similar experience, and that culture shock can be avoided. Furthermore, I learned that culture shock is not only universal, but also temporary. As a result of her advice, I realized that I should be patient, and that I shouldn't go home just yet. My advisor also suggested that I try to keep busy and talk about my culture shock with my friends. I followed this good advice, and as a result, my culture shock has become less troublesome.

In spite of the fact that I sometimes still miss my life in Tajikistan, I don't feel as depressed as I did. Moreover, I no longer want to return home before I finish my program. I know that I can adjust to this new life.

While each person undergoes cultural adjustment at his or her own pace, successful cultural adjustment usually includes passage through the following four stages which I had experienced myself.

- **The Honeymoon Stage:** The first adjustment stage is characterized by a sense of anticipation, exhilaration, and excitement. This is an exciting time as you are fascinated with your new surroundings.
Although you may not fully understand your surroundings at this time, you are eager to fit in.
When misunderstandings increase, you are likely to experience the second state of cultural adjustment.
- **The Hostility Stage:** During this stage you may feel frustration, anger, anxiety, and sometimes depression. The excitement of being in the United States changes to frustration with the bureaucracy, the difficulty of communicating in English every day, and in some cases, physical discomfort or other problems. You may react to this stress by rejecting your new environment and feeling hostile to it.
Many students have academic problems during this stage. The hostility stage can be difficult and painful. It is important for you to keep in mind that you are not alone - most individuals in your position experience these emotions to some degree and that you will be able to overcome them eventually.
- **The Humor Stage:** This stage occurs when you begin to relax in your new surroundings and begin to laugh at minor mistakes and misunderstandings which would have upset you while you were in the hostility stage. By now, you have probably made some friends and adjusted to the new system.
- **The Home Stage:** When this final adjustment stage comes, you feel very loyal to your home culture, but you also "feel at home" in your culture. You probably have successfully adjusted quite a bit to your new environment, and should be proud of your ability to live successfully in two cultures.

SEVIL ALIEVA, UGRAD FELLOW, UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA AT MONROE



Sevil recently participated in a community service event at the College of Education at University of Louisiana at Monroe (ULM). ULM has been awarded a grant for a Service Learning Program that provides a unique experience for a small group of students from various schools in the region to visit the ULM campus. During two four-hour visits, a group of approximately 12 students and two accompanying teachers traveled to ULM. The children had each drawn a poster design on paper before coming to the campus and were going to learn how to implement their design on a computer. Sevil helped a young student create and print a poster he had designed. “I and my friend from Ukraine, Kateryna Kamchatna, were given a boy named Tyler Maon, who was a really gifted boy,” Alieva says. “His picture was the best. ULM plans to organize more grants in the spring semester. And I and my friend will definitely participate.”

Alumni News

Munira Akilova (JFDP 2001)



Munira Akilova studied at Chadron State College (CSC), with fruitful results. As a result of her study, a Memorandum of Collaboration was signed between CSC and the Khujand Branch of Technological University of Tajikistan (KBTUT). It includes faculty and student exchange, research and faculty collaboration. A professor from CSC plans to visit KBTUT with the purpose of establishing a student exchange program. With Munira’s initiative, KBTUT will host a Fulbright Senior Specialist, next month. He will give a course on "Modelling National Economy" and will help to revise econometrics curriculum. Faculty and student seminars are also planned. It is also hoped that this visit will contribute to a joint scientific project.

Alexander Sodiqov (UGRAD 2003)

Alexander is currently studying for his master’s degree at the University of Leeds in England. On February 19, he presented a paper on “The Emerging Developmental Theory of Conflict: The Case of Tajikistan” to a group of fellow students at the Leeds School of Politics and International Studies. According to Alexander, the paper has to do with the emerging approach in conflict and development studies, where conflict is increasingly understood as failure of development. All literature within this approach currently focuses on Africa, and I decided to write the paper to look at how the approach might contribute to better understanding the dynamics of the Tajik civil war and its aftermath.”

Gulru Nabieva (UGRAD 2004)

Gulru is currently studying to receive her master’s degree at the OSCE Academy in Bishkek. In February she gave a presentation on Tajik Nationalism using President Emomali Rahmon’s “Tajik in the Mirror of History” to show how the Tajik government is trying to develop a new sense of nationalism in post-Soviet Tajikistan.

Manzura Makhamova (Muskie 2003)

In February Manzura participated in the ProdExpo – 2008 in Moscow together with six other companies from the fruit and vegetable processing sector in Tajikistan. Manzura “consulted

companies on exhibiting techniques (how to place their products on shelves), assisted in developing a brand identity, helped with developing brochures and leaflets about products they produce, etc.” Manzura also remarked that “some companies were able to sign contracts with suppliers from Russia, Ukraine, Georgia and Israel.” In total more than 2500 companies from 65 countries were represented at the exposition.

Valijon Raoev (UGRAD 2005)

In February Valijon organized a free English discussion club for students at the Tajik State Institute of Foreign Languages in Dushanbe. Valijon leads the club, in which students have the opportunity to improve their English by discussing everyday problems in Tajikistan. The initiative has been quite popular and Valijon will continue conducting the discussion club twice a week in the future.

Diloro Kadirova (Muskie 2005)

After receiving an M.P.A. as a Muskie, Diloro was able to rejoin her former employer on a higher professional level. Diloro is now the Special Assistant to the Representative at the UN Office on Drugs and Crime in Afghanistan. In this position Diloro is working on the UNODC’s biggest program and project portfolio.

Kakhor Aminov (UGRAD 2001)

Kakhor has recently completed a research project in the UK, and has now returned to Tajikistan to work as a Project Coordinator/Policy Expert for a three- year, \$2 million project called Implementation Support for Private Sector Development Strategy in Tajikistan. The project is jointly funded by ADB and DFID and aims to enhance the capacity and leadership of the State Committee on Investments and State Property Management in implementing private sector development strategies in Tajikistan.

Salima Kasimova (Muskie 2005)

Salima recently began working with the World Health Organization in Tajikistan as a National Professional Officer for Family and Community Health. She will support the promotion and implementation of activities related to programs in the Family and Community Health section focusing on gender, reproductive health, maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent health.