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UNH Global

Melinda Negron-Gonzales

Program Coordinator (Politics and Society Program) and Assistant Professor of Political Science - Turkey

In June 2016, I had the opportunity to present a paper at the 3rd Annual Sociology and Critical Perspectives Conference on Social Movements in Istanbul, Turkey. The conference, sponsored by the Eastern Mediterranean Academic Research Center in Turkey, aimed to “explore the dynamics of social movements, along with the ideas that motivate their activists and supporters”

(<http://www.dakamconferences.org/#!/sociocri/evkz2> (<http://www.dakamconferences.org/#!/sociocri/evkz2>)).

The international conference included academics and even some activists from around the world, and presentations covered a range of social movements from Spain to Turkey to India, which facilitated some great on-the-spot comparative analyses of disparate movements.



Professor Melinda Negron-Gonzales

I have conducted research on the human rights and women’s rights movements in Turkey in the past but this time around I focused on a faith-based movement called Hizmet (its name means service) which promotes education and democracy. My paper used the evolving relationship between the Hizmet movement and Turkey’s ruling party to question some of the conventional wisdom in

movement studies, especially the assumption that there is a clear dividing line between a social movement and the state. I proposed that Hizmet provides a good case study to reconsider the state-movement dichotomy, seeing that it appears Hizmet-affiliated civil servants within various state agencies mobilized and coordinated efforts to challenge egregious abuses of power by military personnel and corrupt politicians. Because movement studies have tended to focus on protest movements primarily comprised of political outsiders, there's a dearth of analyses on movements that are close to or partially embedded within the state and on how movements can deliberately "penetrate" the state, organize within it and use the state itself as a resource. My presentation led to a broader conversation among participants about how movements operate in different political systems and how social movements can advance democratization in highly repressive environments. The feedback I received helped to crystallize some of my ideas about potential future research projects on how different movements in Turkey mobilize and generate change.



Sultanahmet (Blue) Mosque in Istanbul, Turkey

My second objective while in Istanbul was to lay the groundwork for a UNH faculty-managed summer study abroad program to Turkey. To this end, I met at Bogazici University with a representative from AIFS (a study abroad provider) to discuss logistics and potential themes for the program. The university is a bucolic respite from the hustle and bustle of Istanbul, one of the world's megacities, and because English is the language of instruction there, UNH students would benefit from

invaluable inter-cultural experiences with Turkish students and would have access to English-language library resources. As a cradle of empires, Istanbul provides a historically rich setting and the trip would especially appeal to UNH students interested in history, political science and Middle Eastern studies. The summer program would begin with the study of Ottoman and Islamic history and then subsequently delve into 'politics and society' in contemporary Turkey, thereby providing a comprehensive overview of this complex country and its region. The city itself would serve as a classroom, and the program would include field trips to historical sites as well as visits to civic organizations.

One of the key factors determining whether or not a trip to Turkey is feasible is the security situation, and just being in the country allowed me to speak to people and assess the collective mood at this critical moment when Turkey's fragile democracy is being tested. Alas, security concerns preclude further development of a study abroad program at this time, but I was glad to have had the opportunity to take some preliminary steps for a future program to be developed after concerns about safety have faded.



View from Bogazici University

I am grateful for the support provided by the Center for International Education and Global Engagement, which made it possible for me to travel to Turkey for a week. The feedback I received at the conference and the contacts I made will help to advance my work as a researcher and educator, and I was also able to figure out some of the logistics for a future study abroad program.

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