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UNH Global

Asian Studies Minor Grows in Breadth and Popularity

Sandhya Shetty, COLA (Associate Professor of English and Coordinator of Asian Studies Minor)

Sunday, October 23, 2016

Asia is the hub of the most extraordinary range of languages, religions, political systems, societies, and thought worlds. A-S-I-A spells a rich, dizzying array of historical and contemporary flashpoints: The Buddha, the Silk Road, the Opium Trade and Wars, the Forbidden City, emerging markets, Nixon in China, Salman Rushdie, Jesuit missions, Aung San Suu Kyi, Pol Pot, the South China Sea, President Duterte and his anti-US rhetoric, Michael Ondaatje, rice fields and tea plantations ...and so much more! It's where an epochal communist revolution exploded at about the same time that a parliamentary democracy succeeded, an anti-colonial nationalist movement led by Mahatma Gandhi and a Muslim nation-state, Pakistan, emerged after a bloody Partition. It is also where, as cultural theorists say, Western postmodernity achieved its Japanese apogee. The Asian diaspora is unbelievably far flung, its American presence among the fastest growing and wealthiest. Three Asian nations possess nuclear weapons: India, China, and Pakistan.



Chengdu, China

At UNH, the interdisciplinary study of Asia -- of the various Asias of the past and present-- just got even more exciting. With the arrival this fall of new tenure-track and visiting faculty in LLC, Anthropology/IA, and Political Science, opportunities for studying Asian cultures, literatures and politics have increased dramatically. UNH's very first tenure-track faculty member in Chinese Language and Literature, Professor Wenjin Cui, is teaching Advanced and Intermediate Mandarin. In

spring 2017, Professor Cui will offer a course in Chinese Literature in Translation. Another first for

COLA and UNH are courses in South Asian ethnic politics and violence focused on Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, offered by Political Science Professor, Madhavi Devasher, and a course on People and Cultures of South East Asia, taught by Professor Smita Lahiri in Anthropology. Professor Lahiri is also teaching a core course in the International Affairs Dual Major program in CIEGE.

In addition to offering stimulating courses in the humanities and social sciences, our new Asian Studies Minor faculty members are engaged in a range of research projects, creating and publishing knowledge about Asia crucial to understanding and solving challenges of global import. Professor Cui in the Languages and Literatures Department wrote her Ph.D. thesis at N.Y.U. on affirmative biopolitics in the work of Lu Xun, probably the single most famous modern writer from China. Cui's teaching and research interests include Modern and Contemporary Chinese literature and culture, Asian cinema, literary theory and aesthetics, critical theory, biopolitics, and the philosophical discourses of modernity.

An expert on South Asia, Professor Devasher, who also joined Asian Studies this fall, received her Ph.D. in Political Science from Yale University where she specialized in ethnic politics and developed secondary interests in international relations, especially conflict behavior. Before arriving at UNH, she was a Postdoctoral Research Associate at Princeton University. Professor Devasher's book project *Crossing Lines: Ethnic and Cross-Ethnic Voting in India* examines the impact of ethnic and religious identity on elections in democratic societies, taking the political choices and representation of the large, vulnerable Muslim minority in India as her case in point.

Visiting Professor of Anthropology/International Affairs, Smita Lahiri was a member of Harvard University's Anthropology Department before she began teaching at UNH. Her course, Peoples and Cultures of Southeast Asia, takes students on an amazing journey through key literary, film and scholarly texts that bring Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines to life in the classroom. While Professor Lahiri's past research has focused on Catholicism in the Philippines, her current project makes an exciting foray into issues of English-language use in the world's largest multilingual democracy, India.

Asian Studies faculty at UNH have long been engaged in projects that speak to what Dean Bostic has identified as "grand challenges" that UNH must address. Education Professor, Sameer Honwad's work in Bhutan, for example, stresses environmental education amongst young adults in Bhutan. Professor Eun Kyong (also in Education) engages in research on childhood education in Korea, while Geography Professor Tu Lan's research throws fascinating light on dynamic, border-breaking

movements of capital and industry flowing from East to West today. Political Science's Professor Chris Reardon and History's Professor Lu Yan have been longstanding and stalwart contributors to East Asian scholarship and teaching, while the English Department's Professors Shetty and Chiu have brought to the study of Asia at UNH literary-cultural perspectives rooted in postcolonial and ethnic studies. Asian Studies at UNH has also benefitted from not one but three philosophers' commitment to teaching Hindu and Buddhist philosophy. As noted by Professor Timm Triplett, it is "unusual for a small department in the U.S. to have three faculty [members] with competence in Asian philosophy - Drew Christie, Val Dusek and myself." Yige Wang (co-director of the Confucius Institute), and his team of instructors from China, and senior lecturer in Japanese, Pam Ikegami, must be credited for their contributions to the transformation of UNH's foreign-language learning landscape through their teaching of the major languages of East Asia at all levels of proficiency. Both language programs are thriving at UNH.



Red Gate at Waseda University in Tokyo

Whether students are looking to develop skills in Mandarin and Japanese, or study the history, geography and politics of China, India, and Southeast Asia; or read the Anglophone writers of Indian, Pakistani, and Sri Lankan origin; or delve into the subtleties of Eastern Philosophy; or reflect on the cultural productions of the Asian-American diaspora, the Asian Studies Minor is indeed the place to go.

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