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### Fall 2019, Notes from a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant in Tajikistan

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UNH Global

## Notes from a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant in Tajikistan

Meaghan Gardena (UNHM '19)

Wednesday, November 13, 2019

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*Fulbright, the U.S. Department of State's flagship cross-cultural exchange program, provides grants that allow young Americans to conduct independent research, pursue graduate study, or teach English abroad for terms of eight to 10 months.*



Meaghan at the Nurek Reservoir in Tajikistan

I was placed in Dushanbe, the capital, along with an English Teaching Assistant (ETA) from last year who renewed her contract. She's a great resource and a good friend--as are all the locals I work with. The embassy decided not to place ETAs in remote towns and villages because ETAs really struggled to adapt and thrive in these secluded areas in the past.

All ETAs attended a few Tajik language lessons during our in-country orientation, and after we settle into our placements, it is our choice to

find language teachers and continue learning (I believe all of us are doing this). I have started working with a great local Tajik teacher and have had 5 classes so far. Now, I can read Tajik (they use the Cyrillic alphabet) and make simple and compound sentences. The present simple tense is the

most difficult tense so far--simple past and simple future are easy. I have lessons 3 days a week, and my grant gives me \$1,000 USD for language training reimbursement. I plan to study the language the whole time I'm here, and perhaps study Russian later.

Tajik people are extremely nice! Whenever I speak even a little Tajik, they excitedly proclaim that my Tajik is beautiful and amazing, even when my pronunciation is slightly off and my grammar is miserable.

As for work, I run a few different "clubs" here at American Space Dushanbe. We can't run "classes" because a class needs to have a curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education, which is a lot of red tape for a cultural program like this to work through--and the club schedule here changes each month to allow for new clubs.

Halloween isn't celebrated here, but everyone loves it! It's their favorite American holiday. So, I've been teaching students how to make masks out of Paper Mache. You'd be surprised how many kids here like gory, violent horror movies. A 14-year-old volunteer working here regaled me with the tale of Final Destination the other day!

And all of us ETAs are working together to hold a Trivia Challenge between the three American Spaces we're located at (Khujand, Bokhtar, and Dushanbe) every week! We have a group message where we share our scores so we can have live scoreboards, which really motivates the students.

Outside of work, I have gone hiking once so far. And I went rock climbing for the first time too! During our in-country orientation, we went to Bokhtar, Kulob, Gharm, Vahdat, Istaravshan, and Khujand together--so I have seen a good part of the country already!

For those who want to follow my year in Tajikistan, I'm writing a blog (<https://mgardena.wordpress.com/>).



Meaghan at a restored fortress in Istaravshan

NOTE: Meaghan had originally applied for a Fulbright ETA to Montenegro. She was an alternate, but in July was contacted by Fulbright to ask if she would consider teaching in Tajikistan; read details of that story (<https://mgardena.wordpress.com/2019/08/20/wait-where/>).

For those interested in applying for a Fulbright grant, contact the Office of National Fellowships (<https://www.unh.edu/fellowships-office/>).

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