

NEWS FROM USEF NEPAL

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A Bulletin of activities and events from the Commission for Educational Exchange between the United States and Nepal

The Commission for Educational Exchange between the United States and Nepal

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR...

The Nepali months of Falgun and Chaitra are very popular for weddings; they also announce the arrival of full spring. This year it feels more like a dry summer.

We've had some special challenges that accompany that: almost no rain has fallen in five months, leaving the Valley dusty and parched; and since late December there have been 16 hours without electricity each day. This load-shedding (as the scheduled blackouts are called) has meant difficult adjustments for *all* Nepalis. And, for our American grantees, our Nepali alumni struggling with work and family commitments, and for the Fulbright Commission office itself. As the monsoon is still months off, there's really no choice but to get creative in our responses and remember to laugh when we can.

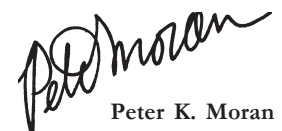
In January, four new Senior Scholars arrived to begin their Lecture/Research or Research awards. First was Professor William Carter of the University of Findlay (Ohio) and his wife Lael; Bill began teaching at Kathmandu University's Department of Environmental Engineering soon after. Just a week later, Dr. Sidne Ward arrived from the University of Missouri (Kansas City), to begin teaching at Kathmandu University's School of Management in information systems and e-learning. The Carters and Dr. Ward are now neighbors in Patan's Dobighat area, close to the Ring Road (for trips to KU in Dhulikhel, and KUSOM in Gwarko). Researchers Dr. Ravi Bhandari of Saint Mary's College (Moraga, CA) and Dr. Thomas Robertson of Worcester Polytechnic Institute (Worcester, MA) also came in January to begin their six month research projects on "The Role of Inequality in the 'New Nepal'" (Dr. Bhandari) and "Developing Development: U.S. Rural Development Programs in Nepal, 1950-1985" (Dr. Robertson). January 2009 also marked the end of our long term lease of the Fulbright House in Tangal. With increasing noise, dust and crime in that neighborhood, not to mention its distance from both KU and TU (and the traffic problems in Kathmandu everyday), we decided not to renew the lease.

In February, some of our American Fulbright student researchers offered short presentations of their ongoing studies in "work in progress" fora. These were well attended, and we had great feedback from people who were interested to hear about a diversity of topics (see inside). Some of the same students presented just a few weeks later at a regional conference for American Fulbrighters in South Asia in Kolkata, India. The main sentiment at the regional meet seemed to be incredulity: in what other venue would you ever hear from such an incredible array of scholars—working in diverse parts of India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal—and in such a huge variety of disciplines?

As of this writing, the annual Fulbright competition has just ended, and Mily Pradhan's desk was overflowing with applications. After sorting through the 250 plus applications to make sure they meet our requirements, we'll begin the task of searching for this year's Nepali nominees for Fulbright Master's, Fulbright Science and Technology Ph.D, and East-West Center MA and Ph.D degrees.



Milyji at her desk, with some of the incoming Fulbright applications for 2010-11


Peter K. Moran

Living a Legacy

Ms. Dyuti Baral is a Humphrey Fellow (2008-09) at the University of Washington, Seattle.

Initiative. Vivacious. Authenticity. Courageous. Effectiveness. Gracious. These words, and more, many more, are ones that come spontaneously to mind if I have to describe the Humphrey Program as experienced to date. If one would want to add some more words, and I know my fellow Humphreys in the University of Washington, Seattle, would be the first ones to do so, **Efficiency, Autonomy, Vitality and Vigor,** come to mind.

What started out for me as a competition, and I admit, before embarking to the US in September 2008, just a bit of confusion, has now amidst all the Humphrey formalities that need to be done, turned into my time for self meditation, of true reflection. A time for bonding, like with my daughter. I like to call these Humphrey months, my moments of zen with deep thoughts on my future art of living.

The Humphrey Program, what a prosaic name it has on the surface. Inside it though, what a wonderful legacy, what power. It is a just program, should one wish it to be this, or something more, should one wish it to be that. Should you wish to explore, it prompts you to think of taking risks and to know more, to seek for answers, perhaps of both what you want to do and what you want to be. Did not Gandhi say, “be the change you want to see”? This is it. This is what being a Humphrey Fellow feels like for me - a truly vibrant experience. And this is probably why it can easily carry all those adjectives and action verbs so well. As a Humphrey, if I may wax lyrical, I have had the chance to wonder, to pause, to look beyond yonder, to give me a cause. It has given me the rare time off away from the daily grind of work back home, to think of what I am and what I can do. Am I really making a difference in what I have been doing? Am I doing all that I can, professionally and personally? Can I be what I have wanted to be, but did not quite have the skills for? Can I do something different, but did not have



Dyuti with daughter Anu at the Smithsonian Museum in New York City

the guts for? How much clearer the path in life seems to be now. Oh yes, there are still patches of grey, some fog that obscures my way, but, living the Humphrey, it could not be a better mid career break for me.

Imagine being surrounded by the world’s finest professionals, imagine being able to network with them, transcending, for the moment, all political and ideological borders. To hear them analyze, and propose their ideas ranging from how they would engage in development work when they return back to their country to how they would lobby for world peace. It is like stepping into this huge cauldron of hope, of what the world could be, maybe will be, and what it may need to shape it that way. And Humphreys, maybe if not all, certainly some, may just be the epicenter catalyzing one such change.



Humphrey Fellows Dyuti Baral and Meena Adhikari (Kunwar) in front of the Capital Building in DC during HHH meeting in October 2008

Having been in the Fulbright Program as a graduate earlier, I think I have a unique privilege of being able to see how both work. Not to compare, of course, but, just to note. I remember reading tomes during my graduate years. I find myself reflecting on those

Contd... on page 6

Experiencing Boston ...A melting pot of cultures...

Mr. Kayur Shrestha is a Fulbright student pursuing his MBA at Suffolk University in Boston.

I recall the first time I heard the word 'Fulbright.' I was a grade 5 student and our school principal was a Fulbrighter from India. At that time, I knew only two things, first he was well regarded and second he was a Fulbrighter. I could not comprehend the connection between Fulbright and becoming someone of his stature then.

Having received the Fulbright grant, I was exultant. I knew this would be a life changing experience - an opportunity to educate myself not only academically but culturally and socially as well. And I came to the right place, Boston. Boston is one of the oldest cities in the US and holds a rich cultural and historical significance.

Before starting my MBA program, I attended the Gateway orientation at Miami, Florida. There I met several Fulbrighters and the orientation gave us a good insight into the US academic and socio-cultural setting. I then went to Boston to pursue my MBA program at Suffolk University. Initially, the ethnic diversity in Boston startled me, but later it helped subdue my anxiety as I no longer felt like a 'foreigner.' On the 'T' (subway, bus), there were people from Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin and North America. Boston from this perspective is a melting pot of cultures. You get a chance to know other cultures also. Recently we celebrated the Chinese New Year of the Ox at our university and the famous 'Lion dance' was performed by 'Bostonians.' Prior I had many preconceived notions about people and life in the US - hectic life; individualistic, competitive and independent people. But after interacting and knowing people here I now know where I was mistaken. Yes, people are individualistic but in being so they do not hinder others' growth or potential. They are competitive but believe in fair competition. People here want to progress as individuals but equal emphasis is put on team building, team



UN Study Trip, Mr. Kayur Shrestha at far left, with Prof. Luise Druke

work. The importance of 360 degree peer feedback, and knowledge sharing in one's professional life, is something I found new, interesting and very useful. In my first MBA class, we were asked to do a simulation and later provide comments on our team members' contribution. The comment I got from most of my peers (who were Americans) was that I was reluctant to express my opinions. At first, it felt awkward. But later, I delved deeper as to why I was given those comments. I could see the cultural connection. People here are more overt and expressive about their opinions than what we experience back home. We are more used to the traditional lecture style education where little or no emphasis is given to team

Dr. Sangeeta Mishra, a Fulbright Student at Johns Hopkins University, was awarded a MPH Field Experience Fund Award from Hopkins for a group project on "Building Local Capacity to Fight Sex Trafficking in Nepal." She along with 4 American students visited Nepal to work on the project in early January, working closely with Maiti Nepal and other organizations. Congratulations to Sangeeta!

Linden Tour Comes To Nepal

Linden Educational Services (<http://www.lindentours.com>), an American company which organizes "college tours" to international locations for American colleges and universities, brought representatives from US colleges and universities to Nepal for the second consecutive year. USEF-Nepal's Educational Advising Center (EAC) team helped organize and manage the Linden US University Fair in Kathmandu, held on the afternoon of February 9th at the Yak & Yeti Hotel. More than 850 students eager to study in the USA crowded into the three-hour fair, where Directors of Admissions from ten American colleges distributed information and answered questions about their colleges. The fair presented students the rare opportunity to access first-hand information directly from Directors of Admissions from US universities. Admission to the university fair was free and open to public.

The participating institutions that took part in Linden's 2009 tour through Nepal were:

- Fairleigh Dickinson University, NJ
- Foothill and DeAnza Colleges, CA
- Johnson & Wales University, RI
- Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, PA
- Loyola Marymount University, CA
- Saginaw Valley State University, MI
- Savannah College of Art and Design, GA
- State University of New York at Oswego, NY
- University of Wisconsin - La Cross, WI
- University of Wisconsin - Superior, WI



Participants register their information before entering the fair

In addition to participating in the university fair, the group also visited Lincoln School in Rabi Bhawan on February 9th for a "mini-fair," where they met with 160 students from four different schools.

The following day, the group visited USEF-Nepal, where they met USEF-Nepal's Executive Director and where advising staff briefed them on the EAC's services for students and US institutions, the Nepali educational system, and current trends in Nepali student mobility to the United States.

USEF-Nepal's EAC helped with logistics for the Linden Tour through Nepal, coordinating with schools for the mini-fair and overseeing the smooth



USEF-Nepal's table at the university fair provides information about EAC services



A college Admissions Director shares information with students at the fair

operation of the university fair. The EAC enlisted the invaluable assistance of sixteen student volunteers (all undergraduate applicants and frequent users of the EAC library and advising

services), who registered fair participants, ensured circulation of participants, assisted with crowd control, and after the fair input registration data of all participants into a database.

From the overwhelming student response to this year's Linden US University Fair, USEF-Nepal's EAC looks forward to many future Linden tours through Nepal!



USEF's EAC staff ensured smooth operation of the university fair

Alumni News

Congratulations to **Mr. Mahendra B. Gurung**, Fulbright Alumna (Colorado State University - 1985), who has been promoted as the Director General of the Department of Water- Induced Disaster Prevention (DWIDP) from his previous post of Regional Director at Central Regional Irrigation Directorate under Department of Irrigation at Bhani Mandal.

Dr. Meena Acharya, New Century Scholar (Clark University - 2004) has been elected to the International Feminist Economic Association for the period 2009-2010. Congratulations Meenaji.

Congratulations to **Dr. Michael Baltutis** (University of Iowa, Dept of Religious Studies, and Fulbright student in Nepal 2005-6), who successfully defended his Ph.D. research on the Indrajatra festival of Kathmandu in late 2008.



Dr. Joshi making his presentation

Dr. Jibgar Joshi, 1987-88 Hubert H. Humphrey Fellow at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology received the Professional Development Grant in late 2008. He attended the International Conference on Built Environment and Developing Countries (ICBEDC) at the University Sains Malaysia (USM) and gave a power point presentation entitled "Sustainable Ways of Managing Environmental Services in Nepal." Dr. Joshi also published his book "Planning Approaches in Nepal" in November 2008.

Talk Programs

Fulbright Alumni Association of Nepal (FAAN) organized talk programs on January 2nd by **Dr. Tek B. Gurung**, a visiting Scholar in 2005-06 at the University of Missouri-Columbia, MO in - 'Restoration of Small Lakes through Cooperative Management: A Suitable Strategy for Poverty-Laden Areas in Developing Countries;' and on February 27th by **Dr. Randall C. Kyes**, Research Professor of Psychology in - 'Primate Conservation Biology in the 21st Century: Global Partnership in Research, Training and Outreach.' Dr. Kyes works closely with his colleague and Fulbright alumna Dr. Mukesh Chalise while in Nepal.

The Fulbright Commission organized short presentations of **Fulbright Scholars' Work in Progress**. These are meant to give the wider community a sense of what American Fulbright Students are researching in Nepal, as well as start new conversations about these topics. On February 3rd, **Ms. Lisa Labita Woodson** discussed "Measuring Receptiveness of Health Messages from Students to Households in Rural Nepal," **Mr. Andrew Nelson** on "Four Ana, Two Children, and One Modern Ghar: An Ethnographic Study into the Building of the 'Kathmandu Dream' in the Urban Periphery," and **Ms. Sarah Shepherd** on "Thread, Looms, and Politics: The Role of Traditional Garments in Dhimal Concepts of Ethnic Identity." On February 17th, the talk program included **Mr. Alden Towler** "Transforming Food, Transforming Health -- Thoughts on Dietary Habits and Diabetes in Kathmandu," and **Ms. Elizabeth Lance** "Fair and Lovely: Beauty, Body Image and Femininity in Kathmandu."

Contd... from page 2

readings now in moments of solitude. But then, not all reflection is quiet or in isolation. There are so many chances of "reflection in action." Of sharing, presenting, debating one's thoughts with others. Like when as a Humphrey I had an opportunity to share with Seattle Rotarians what it meant growing up as a woman in a middle class family that was unconventional, which meant challenging a lot of accepted ways of thinking, of believing and in turn to be creating something new and different in our limited sphere

of influence at work and home. "So," commented one interested audience member, "you have been pushing for small paths of changed behavior. How would you build on that"? More food for thought, isn't it?

Even more interesting was the phrase Ed Roslof, Director, Hubert H. Humphrey Program used to describe us Fellows when all 162 of us from the 98 countries around the world gathered at the State Dinner hosted during the Leadership Program in

Washington DC in October 2008. "You all," he said, "are Ambassadors ...Cultural Ambassadors in the true sense of bridging gaps and building bridges between the US and the world you come from." What a wonderful concept it must have been that started a program of this dimension, what an amazing visionary who thought of this, and what a fascinating team it is who have and are taking this forward. We are indeed very fortunate, for we are living the legacy.

Contd... from page 3

work. I began to understand the importance of constructive criticism for one's own development.

In Feb 2008, our Professor for the UN course took us for a study visit to the United Nations in New York. Having worked with the World Health Organization in Nepal, I was elated to get a firsthand experience of the UN. This visit gave me a good overview of a 'working day' in the UN. I also had the opportunity to go to Albuquerque, New Mexico for the 'Fulbright Enrichment Seminar' where we got briefing on the US electoral process. These are valuable experiences which have inculcated in me a new set of professional, cultural and political view points.

Besides other experiences in Boston, I witnessed two important events - the economic recession and the historic



Nepali food time, with Nisha, Pat, Kayur and Professor Michael Arthur

2008 Presidential elections. Every class started with a discussion on the current economic crisis and its recovery. At present, I am in my last semester of my MBA program concentrating on non-profits. I also work as a volunteer with a local non-

profit here in Boston. This will not only help me put my knowledge to work but also allow me to give something back to the community. I am now looking forward to completing my work here and live up to my Fulbright dreams.

Processing Polished Rice: A Reflection on Diet and Health in Kathmandu

Mr. Alden Towler, a recent graduate of Pitzer College, Claremont, CA, began his Fulbright research on the "Transition of Diet and Health in the Kathmandu Valley" in mid-September 2008.

While Nepal has become famous for the Himalayas, no less impressive is the mountain of rice that most Nepalis eat as the centerpiece of their twice-daily meal. Not long ago the shades of wholesome varieties of rice in the market and on peoples' plates ranged from reds to dark and light browns. The machine-polished rice of today is as white as the snow capping the Himalayas themselves. While Kathmandu's rapid modernization has left the agricultural hardships associated with hand-hulled, less processed red and brown rice behind, the consequences of a new addiction to overly processed foods includes a Type 2 diabetes epidemic which affects close to one third of the Kathmandu Valley's population.

According to a study conducted by the Nepal Diabetes Association, while only 3-4% of Nepal's rural population is affected, 18% of Kathmandu's urban population over the age of 40 has Type 2 Diabetes, and an additional 10% suffer from a pre-diabetic state called Impaired Fasting Glycaemia¹ underpinned by insulin resistance. The term "Syndrome X" or "Metabolic Syndrome" has been coined to refer to a host of interrelated symptoms including obesity, high blood pressure, and high blood fats levels—the underlying cause of these symptoms being insulin resistance. The conditions of Metabolic Syndrome pave the road to diabetes and other related conditions like heart disease, eye problems, kidney failure, and limb amputation, just to start the list. Over the last five months, through interviews and informal conversations, I have been researching the dietary habits and conceptions of food in Kathmandu that I relate to the onset of Metabolic Syndrome in Nepal.

The body converts most foods we eat into glucose. Whereas sugar, along with processed carbohydrates like white rice and white flour, convert very



Alden and friend Guru Bhotia in Shiva Puri National Park, with a wild edible plant called "nalu" in Bhotia ("thotne" in Nepali).

quickly, whole grains like brown rice, wheat, corn, and millet are converted more slowly, and vegetables and beans are slower still. Over the course of years, as people continue to overdose on highly refined, rapidly digested carbohydrates like white rice, the body's ability to deal with so much glucose wears out. Overwhelmed by too much insulin (produced to lower otherwise harmfully high blood sugar levels), glucose-burning cells become resistant to insulin, thus inducing the complications of Metabolic Syndrome.

Until quite recently people in Kathmandu spent much more time walking, doing physical house and agricultural work, and playing outdoors. Although peoples' physical activity has dramatically decreased, the average amount of food and total calories people eat has remained the same if not increased. *Daal-bhaat*, the traditional Nepali meal usually consisting of a staggering amount of rice and a far smaller portion of lentil soup and vegetables, is relatively well-suited to someone engaged in physical activity—

¹ Singh, Dr. D.L.; Diabetes- Care and Management; "Understanding Diabetes Mellitus"; Nepal Diabetes Association, Rotary Club of Nepal, 2006.



Alden Towler and friends at Bhai Tika

as it provides an abundance of energy for a hard worker—but it is a recipe for disaster for those who live sedentarily and also indulge in a lot of meat, alcohol, and modern junk foods.

Considering how deeply ingrained rice is in Kathmandu, eating rice in its healthier less processed forms should become a priority. The *dhiki* is a device traditionally used for hulling rice in Nepal actively present even in central Kathmandu until about 45 years ago. The *dhiki*'s physically intensive process of beating rice with a heavy beam of wood removes the inedible hull of rice but leaves partially intact the nutrient-rich bran and germ layer below which give the whole grain its distinctive flavor, color, and health benefits. The modern machine mill processes rice

with far greater speed and with hardly any physical effort but strips away the bran and germ leaving only almost entirely plain starch remaining. White rice lacks the vitamins, minerals, and fiber found in the bran and germ that are necessary for proper and slow digestion of the whole grain. As one Nepali woman told me “We no longer have the hardships of the past, but we suffer with new diseases.”

White rice of course, is not the only problem. White flour, as opposed to whole-wheat flour, has become the main ingredient of most snack foods found in Kathmandu—momos, chowmein, chow-chow/ wai-wai noodles, naan, puri, samosas, biscuits, and bakery products. Sugar-sweetened Nepali tea with biscuits is of course a quintessential Nepali snack. The increasing popularity of these junky snack foods among the city's youth threatens public health even more severely than the mountains of white rice synonymous with *daal-bhaat*.

Everyone I have talked to about rice hulled by the *dhiki* says that it is incredibly tasty, filled with flavor and healthier than that milled by the machine. What most Nepalis do not know, however, is that machine mills can produce brown rice (unpolished rice), which is in fact available at many stores in Kathmandu. Unfortunately brown rice is relatively hard to find and nearly twice the price as the fully polished varieties, from which the removed bran and germ have been sold and added to animal feed.

When I talk to Nepalis about this sort of unpolished rice it does not seem very appetizing to them. “It isn't tasty,” many say, because they think the rice would be “hard” texturally and “bland” in flavor. The irony is that many of the city-people who say this have never tasted unpolished rice before, so how would they know? Regardless, the habit of eating white rice, like any deeply rooted habit, is a very hard one to change. The same Nepali health professionals who explain how difficult it is to make vegetables a more

prominent proportion on the dinner plate, simply because of habit, also tell me how once they started eating brown rice, white rice was never as satisfying again—neither for their taste buds nor their stomach.

The attitudes taken towards unpolished rice by many people living in Kathmandu are similar to those that they take toward *dhido*, a traditional staple food of Nepal. *Dhido* is cooked with the flour of whole grains such as buckwheat, millet, corn, and wheat. Those who have a habit of eating it enjoy its more complex flavors and its hearty nature. *Dhido* is widely recognized by nearly all Nepalis to be more filling (after eating you don't get as hungry as soon), and healthier for the body. (It is also the exact kind of whole grain food that dieticians recommend for the prevention and treatment of Metabolic Syndrome.) Those who don't have a habit of eating it however don't seem to take any interest in it at all. When I ask some people whether they eat *dhido*, an almost disgusted and shocked look comes over their face as if to say “me? Eat *that* stuff?” They reply “No, not really,” “I eat it every once in a while, a few times a year,” “it's too hard to cook,” “*dhido* is bland, I prefer rice.”

In many ways, while unpolished rice and *dhido* symbolize the antiquity of village life and a way of eating that has nourished hundreds of generations who never suffered from insulin resistance, white rice symbolizes the modernity born from industry and an era of unprecedented metabolic illness. I am not suggesting that everyone in Kathmandu beat their rice with a *dhiki*, but my research shows that the wellbeing of urban Nepal depends upon a shift of consciousness and habit. The foods from the past (and present for the millions who still enjoy whole grain foods regularly) should not become relics, but rather the keystones of a modernity that champions wholesome awareness instead of refined ignorance.