The Miriam Drake Theatre was filled to capacity with students, faculty, staff and community members for the James E. Smith Midwest Conference on World Affairs, held in November. They enjoyed the opportunity to hear Dr. Reza Aslan speak about “The Future of the New Middle East.”

Aslan, whose family immigrated from Iran to the United States when he was a child, addressed five myths related to the Arab Spring:
- It came as a surprise.
- It is not about democracy, but about economics.
- It is about Islamization.
- It is bad for Israel.
- It is bad for America.

Aslan is the author of No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam, which has been named by Blackwell Publishers as one of the 100 most important books of the last decade. It is now available in thirteen languages. He is also the author of How to Win a Cosmic War, a contributing editor to The Daily Beast, and a member of many prominent foreign relations and policy councils. He is also the editor of Tablet and Pen, a literary anthology that uses the arts to bridge the gap of understanding between East and West. Aslan appears regularly in the media, on The Daily Show with Jon Stewart and The Colbert Report among other high profile outlets. In the corporate realm, Aslan is President and CEO of Aslan Media Inc., which runs BoomGen Studios, a unique media company focused entirely on entertainment about the Greater Middle East and its Diaspora communities. He has degrees in Religion from Santa Clara University, Harvard, and UC Santa Barbara, as well as a Master of Fine Arts from the University of Iowa, where he was named the Truman Capote Fellow in Fiction.


Many issues that shape the quality of our lives have an international dimension. Global economic interdependence, the development of appropriate environmental strategies, the resolution of regional conflicts and the enhancement of human rights all require a global perspective. Important aspects of the educational experience include discussion and interaction with people from diverse cultures. Since 1964, Kearney State College, now the University of Nebraska at Kearney, has sponsored a world affairs conference to discuss issues of global importance. In 1988 the name of the conference was changed to honor Professor James E. Smith, its founder.

Normally, the conference has been held in March. However, in an effort to make the conference more beneficial to students and faculty, the executive planning committee along with Deans and the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs made a decision to move the conference to the fall. This event marked the move in that direction.
From the Director

Some 2,700 people attended the Scott D. Morris International Food and Cultural Festival this month, the largest annual celebration of global cultures in central Nebraska. As Roy Machamire, president of the International Student Association, said in his opening remarks, “We international students have learned so much from the people of Kearney and the UNK community and it has changed our lives for the better in so many ways – this is our way of saying thanks to all of you.”

UNK’s global dimension has shown other signs of growth and vigor over the past several months. According to UNK’s immigration tracking system, there were 511 international students on campus as of February – 11.59% more than Spring 2011, and 3.59% more than Fall 2011.

As of February, new international student enrollment (Undergrad and ELI) was 55.56% higher than Spring 2011 and 15.46% higher than Fall 2011. The record number of new Korean students arriving this term helped to push our residence hall occupancy above the previous Fall level for the first time in many years.

The largest international enrollment this semester is from China (145), Korea (121), and Japan (111), followed by Colombia (22), Saudi Arabia (17) and Nepal (11), with students from 36 countries in all.

In November, an overflow crowd gathered to hear Reza Aslan speak on the very timely issue of ‘The Future of the New Middle East’ at the James E. Smith Midwest Conference on World Affairs, just as our Fall Semester in China was enjoying its second successful year and 20 other UNK students were preparing for their upcoming UNK Spring 2012 Semester in Peru program. This summer, all students who complete the Peru program will be eligible to attend UNK’s newest program in Valladolid, Spain. Both the Conversation Table and International Friendship programs have continued to grow as more community members learn of these great ways to experience other cultures.

Korean Student Recruitment

Jaekeun Cho, the Korean/Asian Recruitment and Support Specialist for the UNK Office of International Education has returned from a successful recruitment trip to South Korea. While he did spend some time with prospective students, a large portion of Cho’s time was spent meeting with more than one-hundred Korean students who were set to arrive at UNK for the Spring 2012 semester. He gave presentations that provided helpful information about UNK, Kearney and Nebraska. With Cho’s experience as a UNK student and now a staff member, he was able to answer the questions the students had related to the campus and community. He also gave the students access to his blog, on which he shares a great deal of interesting and helpful information for prospective students deciding where they want to study in the United States.

Another exciting aspect to this recruitment trip is the delegation of UNK administrators and professors who joined Cho for a portion of his time there. The delegation included: Dr. John La Duke, Dean of the College of Natural and Social Sciences; Dr. Susan Jensen, Professor of Business Management and Associate Dean of the College of Business and Technology; Dr. Matt Mims, Professor of Counseling and School Psychology, representing the Dean of the College of Education; and Dr. Dallas Kenny, Director of International Education. For some, this was their first trip to South Korea.

They visited several partner universities, meeting administrators, professors and students. It was particularly enjoyable for them to share information about our school and community with the students. Additionally, the group attended information sessions on international higher education in South Korea. After finishing their busy work schedules, Jaekeun took the group to some famous tourist sites and restaurants where they enjoyed extraordinary Korean food! The delegation reported having a tremendous time on this unforgettable recruitment trip.
Eleven people participated in a Faculty/Staff Development Trip to Shijiazhuang and Beijing, China, June 7-22, 2011. The group included: Dean of Natural and Social Sciences John La Duke and his wife Barbara, Grant Anderson and Rachelle Kamrath from the Department of Communications, Director of Counseling and Health Care LeAnn Obrecht and her husband Bill, Richard Meznarich from Industrial Technology, Anita Lor- entzen from the Department of English, Dean for the Division of Student Affairs Joe Oravecz, former International Student Advisor George Omwondho and ELI Instructor Traci Schellhase.

The group spent a majority of the trip in Shijiazhuang, where they enjoyed participating in several cultural activities such as traditional Chinese dance, painting, and a lecture on Chinese culture at Hebei Normal University. Middle School students who taught the group Chinese painting techniques sent them home with paintings of landscapes and famous Chinese poems that many have proudly displayed in their offices and campus buildings. They also spent a day with local host families, going to the open market, making dumplings and playing Chinese games.

Three UNK Chinese students served as fabulous hosts who accompanied the group to restaurants, shopping centers and other local excursions. This opportunity was equally as meaningful to the students, according to JingTing Jia, who said, “I really enjoyed meeting you in China. When I showed you the amazing things in my home city, I felt proud to be Chinese. “This is where I grew up! This is China!” is what I wanted to tell everyone. Chinese people are friendly and love to share our culture with people from around the world. Even my parents enjoyed having you at my house because they are learning how Americans behave and are proud of their daughter for making so many friends and speaking better English.”

Some of the other sights the group saw in Shijiazhuang were the Stone Village, Zhou Zhou Bridge and a Buddhist Temple. They were also able to see suburban government housing and attend a singing rehearsal for the 90th anniversary of the Communist Party in China.

Joe Oravecz and LeAnn Obrecht were asked to give a presentation on the American system of higher education to Hebei Normal University’s Student Affairs Division. This opened the door for further discussion about Americanization of Chinese Student Affairs. They deal with the same concerns and issues as U.S. institutions: academic advising and parental involvement, and college student mental health issues.

In Beijing, the group toured the Olympic Campus, Tiananmen Square, People’s Congress, Forbidden City, and 598 Art District. They found Beijing to be more international, as opposed to Shijiazhuang, where they were more aware of being an under-represented ethnic group.

Joe Oravecz beautifully summed up the experience, “The adage of “Don’t judge someone until you have walked a mile in his shoes.” can in part sum up any study/travel abroad experience and the understanding one garners of a culture different than your own. Having the opportunity to be in the home country of many of our international students allowed the participants in the faculty development trip to truly have a better understanding of how we can better assist with the acculturation of our international students to the United States, to Nebraska, and to Kearney. Going to China, learning about and participating in the Chinese culture, we now have a clearer picture and enhanced understanding of what barriers they could be experiencing upon their arrival. It is up to all of us to continue providing a welcoming environment in the classrooms, programs, and services to assist our international students being successful.”
In an effort to get some “actual experiences,” the Conversation Partners Project began about 10 years ago for nursing students at the Kearney Division of the UNMC College of Nursing.

This project matches nursing students with students from different countries who are enrolled in the English Language Institute at UNK. The project began as a part of the former Essentials of Nursing Care course, and now is a part of the Patient Centered Care course.

Jo Miller, assistant professor, team teaches the course. “Culture was one of the major concepts in our course,” she said. “We wanted the students to do more than write a paper. We wanted them to have an actual experience – a relationship with someone whose culture is different. We hope to decrease their fear and anxiety when having to deal with someone from a different culture.”

The program started when Miller and another instructor, Steph Burge, responded to an email sent out by UNK’s English Language Institute Educator, Linda Martin, looking for university students to work with ELI students. The three faculty got together and planned how to make the project work. “It’s evolved since then,” Miller said. “It’s a big hit and an excellent learning experience. Communication is the cornerstone of nursing.”

The next three meetings the students are on their own, planning their own meetings and activities. Some of the activities have included painting pumpkins, playing miniature golf, bowling, going out for ice cream, visiting a farm, cooking for each other, going for walks or just meeting in the library to talk. “The students find out they have more things in common than different,” Miller said. “Because many of the international students are from giant cities, they tell our students how much they love it here, how safe they feel, and they can see the stars.”

The final meeting is a joint presentation between the students – where they both tell the story of their conversation partner. “Of course, the nursing students fail if they can’t pronounce their partners name,” Miller says jokingly.

For the nursing students, the project is a part of their grade, a requirement to pass the class. For the international students, Martin said, the students get extra credit points in two of their classes. “Our students get experience with conversation outside of the classroom,” Martin said. “This brings vocabulary and idioms for them to understand and practice, gives them listening practice which helps to develop their ear, allows them to gain confidence that they can and will be understood and allows them the opportunity to present information about their cultures to an interested listener.”

Miller adds, “It’s a win-win situation on both sides. Because they see each other for six weeks, they really get to know each other. Our students find out how courageous the foreign students are to come here. Most are only 18 or 19 years old. They’re sometimes lonely. They want American friends.”

Maureen Stump, a first semester nursing student participated in the program last semester. “This experience was very good for me in learning how to communicate with people from different cultures,” she said. “It was fun to learn about their culture and way of life.”

Conversation Partners is open to all UNK domestic students.
Seven UNK students have returned from Shijiazhuang, China where they participated in UNK’s Semester in China program at Hebei Normal University. The students are:

Ruddy Jimenez—Kearney
Shaba Alavi—Kearney
Andrew Limbach—Kearney
Jennifer McMurtry—Bayard
Kirsten Flavell—Kearney
Max Chatelain—Kearney
Teruhisa Takahashi—Japan

Also, being able to travel to a variety of different places within China only added to the adventure. I met so many great people and left with a couple of life-long friends. There are too many valuable lessons and experiences to take away from an opportunity like this to not do it. I would recommend study abroad to anyone.

Shaba Alavi

There are some things in life that people experience and they are inexplicable. They influence you in a multitude of ways. China for me was one of those experiences. I sit here and I am supposed to explain my experience but I am a loss for words. It, simply put, was amazing but that doesn’t seem to cover it. The people in China were exceptionally generous, nice and warm. I never felt out of place. Here I was thousands of miles away from home, I couldn’t speak the language but I didn’t feel out of place at all. Even more so, they made it seem as if I were a rock star. I could go anywhere and do anything I wanted. Not because of hubris but because the Chinese people wanted me to interact and be around them. Then came the trips we took as part of the travel abroad program. We went on a series of trips for this program and they were fantastic. I loved them. The best one that we did as a group would have been going to Xi’an and seeing the terracotta soldiers. We saw dozens of ancient ruins that have lasted generations. I have been to other ruins like Persepolis and castles in England and France. But, none of them hit me as much as this one did. These two factors alone made this trip an experience of a life time.

Jennifer McMurtry

Being in China was an extremely fulfilling experience. The trips we took and the people we met were amazing. Every city was a little different and I am so happy we were able to see so much in such a short time. My favorite thing I did (besides eat food) was that I got to stay with my friend at her house during the national holiday. Her family was so nice! They took me to restaurants, made me so much good food, took me to an amusement park and I even got to go to China town! Even after being back here for a couple of months, I can still remember a lot of the Mandarin I learned. Sometimes I hear Chinese students talking and can pick up on a few words. I really miss my good friends from there and try to keep in touch with email. Meeting people wasn’t hard because there are so many English Universities near our school. Sometimes I felt a little like a celebrity being there, the people were so nice and welcoming, I never once felt threatened or scared. Going there in the middle of my studies at UNK was one of the best decisions I’ve made. I was able to get out of the flow for a while and come back charged up and ready to finish my classes for graduation. I am so glad I went.
Gui-Jie Zhang Receives Prestigious KUDO Award

Chancellor Doug Kristensen nominated Gui-Jie Zhang for a prestigious Board of Regents KUDO Award, which was presented at the September, 2011 Board of Regents meeting in Lincoln. Chancellor wrote the following in his nomination:

“Gui-Jie began her service to UNK in 2005. Her major responsibilities include coordinating UNK’s American Association of State Colleges and Universities/Sino American dual degree program with several universities in China; advising more than 140 Chinese undergraduates and other international students; helping to facilitate partnerships with Chinese universities, high schools, and organizations; supporting the implementation of UNK’s Semester Abroad and Faculty Development Programs in China; assisting with the recruitment of undergraduate, degree-seeking students from China; and helping Chinese student applicants with the visa application process. In addition, she serves as a facilitator for interactions between UNK and its institutional partners in China and has arranged meetings and provided translation for members of UNK’s administration at various Chinese partner universities and high schools. All of these responsibilities result in a career that is far more than an eight-to-five job. She is frequently that “someone” who mothers the students when an away-from-home mother is needed; who befriends them when a friend is needed; and who teaches them when academic issues require her special guidance.”

“I am happy that I can be here to support our students’ needs,” she says. “I don’t know each day what kind of challenge I will have, but I am happy I can be here for them.”

Gui-Jie is an invaluable asset to the Office of International Education and to the entire UNK Community. Her supervisor, Director of International Education Dallas Kenny, credits her with much of UNK’s success in rapidly growing its Chinese student enrollment. “She works tirelessly,” he says, “and her efforts are truly exemplary.”

International Alumni, we have web pages for you!

unk.edu/international

♦ Update your contact information with us and tell us what has been going on in your life.
♦ Read about other UNK international alums.
♦ Catch up on news and happenings by reading the Global Newsletters.
♦ See the campus activity calendar or access the UNK Alumni Association website.

If you are interested in being a person prospective students could email about life at UNK, contact Bonnie Payne at: payneb@unk.edu