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Fieldwork in the classroom

Graduate students journey to Pakistan to assess teachers as part of a public policy project



photographs courtesy of SARAH SIMONS

Sarah Simons (center) and John Hellmann (left), second-year public policy graduate students, spent three weeks of winter break in Pakistan doing research for their Applied Policy Project. They are examining rural school and teacher development in Pakistan.

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When second-year public policy graduate students Sarah Simons and John Hellmann went to Pakistan over winter break, they found they were greeted by villagers who were just as eager to promote literacy as they were.

"People were welcoming our thoughts on their country," Hellmann said. "It was a really great dialogue."

The two students went beyond the traditional work in the United States when designing their Applied Policy Project required by the Department of Public Policy.

Both said they are interested in international development, so they worked in conjunction with Developments in Literacy, or DIL, a non-profit organization that runs literacy programs in underdeveloped areas of Pakistan.

According to the DIL Web site, one year of basic education for a child in Pakistan costs about \$50. The DIL program operates as a bottom-up process, with Village Education Committees made up of local village members set up in communities.

Members of those committees interact with parents, encouraging them to send their daughters to the schools DIL establishes, Simons said.

Simons and Hellmann, who spent three weeks in Pakistan, designed a project to assess the teacher-development programs put into place for girls in village schools.

In the months leading up to their trip to Pakistan, Simons and Hellmann did research on how the development programs work. They said they plan to continue their research now that they are back at UCLA. While in Pakistan the students interviewed both staff and teachers, many of whom are low-skilled, working within the DIL program to assess their performance and the training provided to them.

Many areas in Pakistan will have government-run schools open for both boys and girls, but cultural factors limit female participation, Simons said.

"There are cultural things that need to be addressed. ... Parents aren't comfortable with girls and boys in the same classroom after fifth grade, and they're not comfortable with girls walking by themselves," she said. "So (government) indirectly will shut out opportunities for girls."

While incorporating local involvement through village education committees can help ease parents' worries, Simons said villagers who are involved with the program can sometimes face opposition.

Simons specifically remembers two men who faced ostracism for promoting the program in a tight-knit community, but continued to stand up and explain the importance of schooling for girls.

"Hearing two men say that was really powerful," Simons said. "Maybe I had expected the women to be promoting girls' education, but it was across the board."

Simons said generally the people they were there to help were very accepting of their presence and willing to talk about a whole range of issues.



Simons and Hellmann spent time at a variety of schools during their stay in Pakistan, where they interacted with teachers, staff members and students.



courtesy of SARAH SIMONS

Hellmann (above) said he felt generally accepted by the people he went to help in Pakistan. "Pakistanis used to be really pro-American before this whole war on terror, but now are starting to second-guess ... American views and motivations," he said.

"Pakistanis used to be really pro-American before this whole war on terror, but now are starting to second-guess ... American views and motivations," Hellmann said. "(But) they didn't attribute American policy to us."

The Applied Policy Project, which involves consulting with companies or the government in tackling a policy problem, is required of all second-year public policy graduate students.

Hellmann and Simons plan to continue research back at UCLA and complete their assessment in March.

They said they pieced together funding for the project from a variety of sources, including their own pockets.

Maciek Kolodziejczak, director of student services at the School of Public Affairs, said the quality of Hellmann and Simons' proposal and product might help to foster a more formalized funding process for the project.

"Sarah and John were very tenacious and resourceful. They assembled funding from a variety of sources," Kolodziejczak said.

Hellmann said that while the department offers numerous courses in the international realm, funding and support for similar projects to take place abroad should be more feasible for those focusing on international affairs.

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