

From the Director

As I write this, *Slumdog Millionaire* is big news and American interest in India and South Asia is sure to increase. At Carolina, interest in South Asia has been growing in leaps and bounds. With several new appointments our capacity to meet the burgeoning demand for South Asia courses is greatly enhanced.

While India has been a focus of business interest in the region, remarkable ethnic and cultural diversity and the important political and strategic concerns have all raised the profile of the various countries of South Asia in the United States. No doubt these factors have also played a role in promoting academic interest and stimulating student curiosity.

Carolina students can now take a concentration in South Asian Studies offered by the Department of Asian Studies as part of its major in Asian Studies. Related, Hindi-Urdu language classes have been expanding in recent years. Interest in South Asia is reflected in the increase in students taking study abroad programs, up from just 4 in 2006 to 21 in 2008. Significant in this has been the UNC Summer in India program, highlighted in this issue. The Phillips Ambassadors Program has also made a remarkable contribution.

UNC-Chapel Hill is fortunate to be a part of the North Carolina Center for South Asian Studies, recognized as a National Resource Center by the Department of Education. A project of the Triangle South Asia Consortium (UNC, Duke and NC State), the center provides a program of visiting speakers, academic meetings and a hugely varied but always fascinating series of cultural events.

With the success of *Slumdog Millionaire*, Carolina's faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences and in professional schools are well-placed to respond to increased student interest. We can look forward to even greater engagement with the countries and peoples of South Asia.

Finally, in these difficult economic times, I urge all Carolina's many friends of Asian studies to continue to support the CAC as we do our best to promote Asia and Asian studies on campus.

Kevin Hewison, *Director*

All You Can Eat Mangoes: UNC's Summer in India Study Abroad Program

By Afroz Taj and John Caldwell

Summer in India? Are you crazy? This is a common response from people who have experienced Delhi's unforgiving weather in May and June. It's hot, 120°F on average, day and night. You have AC and fans, but not during the power cuts. There are bugs. Sandstorms. Protests. Traffic jams. Hawkers. Are you hooked yet? It takes an adventurous person to even apply for the UNC Summer in India study abroad program.

If you are one of the daring ones, you'll spend 6 weeks exploring a country that has fascinated and attracted people worldwide for centuries. Even well-traveled students agree that no other place prepares you for the India experience. It's the juxtapositions that overwhelm. Massive chrome and glass skyscrapers tower over grazing buffalo. Cycle rickshaw wallahs chat on mobile phones.

Superhighways wind through mango groves. And everywhere you look, a thousand contrasting, clashing colors: bright green parrots on a red sandstone wall, fluorescent yellow and fuchsia dupattas (women's scarves), mounds of fruits and vegetables on carts in the crowded bazaars.

The UNC Summer in India program was first launched in 1998. For a while it was run from NC State but it is now firmly in place as one of UNC's longest running and most popular faculty-led programs. Students enroll in two courses. One studies Hindi language and the other explores the historical interactions between Hinduism and Islam in South Asia.

The first two weeks of the program are in India's national capital, Delhi which is rich in history. Students stay in the Nehru Guest House at Jamia Millia Islamia, one of Delhi's big three universities. From Delhi there is an excursion up to Haridwar and Rishikesh, twin pilgrimage sites for Hindus at the foothills of the Himalayas. Dip your feet in the Ganga while watching the saffron-clad sadhus perform their devotions.

From Delhi we travel to the southeast for a

homestay in Aligarh. This is an opportunity for students to live with an Indian family and practice their Hindi while learning to cook or play cricket with the neighborhood kids. The next stop is Agra for a lesson in Mughal history, a visit to the glorious Taj Mahal, and a soccer match



Professor Afroz Taj with basket of fresh mangoes

with the local team. From the fertile fields and orchards of Uttar Pradesh the class sets out westward into the Rajasthan desert, where the destination is Jaipur and its salmon pink city walls, hundred lanes and wonderful bazaars.

The program then returns to Delhi to focus on modern history and the upheavals that have shaped India in the last 60 years. The politics of language, religion, and caste all come into play, not to mention rapid globalization and a population that has soared over one billion. By the end of the trip, students will have a firm grasp of the complexities that confront modern India, and of the amazing progress that is being made.

Having led this trip for 10 years, the highlight is always watching students get beyond the heat and dust to discover the richness of Indian culture and the ways in which the Indian people daily overcome their difficulties and differences. By the end of June, what seemed chaos now appears invigorating complexity; the alien has become approachable.

And don't forget: the hotter the weather, the sweeter the mangoes!

Grace MacNair: Mahatma Gandhi Fellow and Doula

When people ask me how I trained to be a doula (labor supporter) I usually describe the *Doulas of North America International* requirements. But the more truthful answer is: the women of India.

When I arrived to volunteer as a doula in Delhi in December 2008, I had no experience helping women in labor. When I left six months later, my head was packed with vivid memories and the cries of hundreds of babies. My trip to India was made possible by the Mahatma Gandhi Fellowship through the student group Sangam, the South Asian Awareness Association at UNC.

In India, I experienced three very different birth cultures. I witnessed the grim realities of India's subsidized maternity care by volunteering in the overcrowded

labor room of a government hospital where conditions were exceptionally difficult and where the women were often fearful of the medical staff. After I gave a presentation on the benefits of doula support, the doctors lifted the ban on relatives in the birth room and a system was created wherein each laboring woman was asked to bring a female relative or friend to play a doula-like role.

Some of my favorite work was the three days a week I spent with traditional Indian midwives, known as Dais. I partnered with a local NGO to hold empowerment and educational training sessions for groups of Dais scattered throughout

Delhi's slums. The structure of the groups ensured that knowledge and information flowed both ways, as the Dais' ethnomedical knowledge and insight into their communities is a dynamic vehicle for empowerment and education. Our goal was to assist the Dais in creating a "bank" of supportive traditions and medical information to help them overcome and prevent pregnancy complications. This work has revealed opportunities for Dais to gain recognition through NGO-initiated support and training programs.

Finally, I accessed the birth culture of high caste, affluent Indians through supporting three private clients and assisting Delhi's only two childbirth educators. Supporting women in hospitals where the cesarean section rates are as high as 80% showed how the overuse of

technology and biomedicine's mechanical understandings of health and the body often perpetuate a more hidden, yet equally grave, exploitation of women's rights within the private health sector.

Clearly, it is the women of India who really deserve the credit for my doula training. Although I now feel comfortable supporting women in labor, like any good teacher, each of the women I supported showed me how much I have yet to learn.

Grace MacNair, a sophomore, is an undeclared major with minors in medical anthropology and creative writing.



Grace (holding baby) and Bhimla, a Dai who has delivered over 1,000 babies

New Chair of Department of Asian Studies: Dr. Jan Bardsley

The Department of Asian Studies was formed in 2004, and after 5 very productive years as the inaugural chair, Dr. Gang Yue is stepping down, to be replaced by Dr. Jan Bardsley.

Born and educated in California, Dr. Bardsley (PhD, UCLA, 1989) has been a Tar Heel since 1994. She led two Carolina study abroad programs to Kyoto and teaches Japanese literature, theater, and women studies. She is the recipient of the Sitterson Award for Excellence in Freshman Teaching and a Tanner Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching.

Dr. Bardsley's research explores gender politics in Japan and her most recent book is *The Bluestockings of Japan* (2007) and translates the writings of early Japanese feminists. In 2001, with Professor Joanne Hershfield, Dr. Bardsley made the documentary video, *Women in Japan: Dreams of the Past, Memories of the Future*. Her forthcoming book is *Manners and Mischief: Gender and Power in Japanese Conduct Literature* (from the University of California Press). Dr. Bardsley's current research builds on her Carolina classes—"Geisha in History, Fiction, and Fantasy" and "Chasing Madame Butterfly"—and looks at how such icons of femininity as the geisha, the princess, and the beauty queen have been viewed as symbols of women's liberation. She is a huge fan of Japanese culture old and new.



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CAC Announces 2009-2010 Grier Woods Recipients

The Grier/Woods Presbyterian China Initiative created through a gift from 1978 Carolina graduate Amy Woods Brinkley aims to further develop Chinese studies in the College of Arts and Sciences. The CAC is pleased to announce the 2009-10 awardees.

Grier/Woods Presbyterian Initiative Fellowships in Chinese Studies
Gang Yue, Associate Professor, Asian Studies
Michelle King, Assistant Professor, History

Grier/Woods Presbyterian Initiative China Travel Awards
Gang Yue, Associate Professor, Asian Studies
Wei-Cheng Lin, Assistant Professor, Art

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