

# **Trip Report**

by  
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I believe that my study at the University of Kentucky is one of the most useful things in my professional development. The Academic Year started the 24<sup>th</sup> of August and since that day I have been encountering many challenges and difficulties in my studies and in my everyday life in the U.S. At the beginning it was hard to understand the students' talking and expressing their ideas. Later, when I started learning more about language, I could appreciate my experiences more. In my opinion, the objective of American Studies is that I have to know as much as possible about America and of course to develop my syllabi on American Studies. This is the purpose of my trip to the United States. Before the establishment of the American Studies Program at the Kyrgyz National University, professors were facing many problems as lack of information, lack of materials, and the lack of knowledge about America. That's why, we are here to see, understand and learn ourselves all about America. All four of us have our own fields of interests. I am deeply interested in American Culture, Film and Music and tried to find some relevant classes.

I know that the educational system in America differs from the educational system in Kyrgyzstan. When I started attending classes at UK, I understood the differences in more useful detail. The first two weeks, I attended every class that had the name "culture" in its title. But when professors began to ask students to buy books and to do readings, I had to make a decision: Whether to attend all the classes or choose four main classes. Finally, I made my decision to attend only four classes. The courses I settled on were "Appalachian Music 502", "History of Film Eng-381", "Intercultural Communication Comm-462", and "The Law in the American Image AC-301". Of course, it was so challenging to do all readings and understand at the same time. Returning back home, I will teach a course called "American Arts in Music and Film". And for the other two courses, I believe, I will develop my syllabi to teach similar classes and will advance them to be important and useful courses at our Department of International Relations at the Kyrgyz National University.

To find all these classes and to attend them, I was helped by Professor Stanley Brunn, whom I appreciate very much. And there are two other professors whom I had sent emails saying that I am interested in attending their classes. In general, all UK professors were friendly, understanding and always welcoming me and helping with my syllabi and assignments. That's what I really appreciate. There is a difference between professors at our two universities. In our university, professors are more governed by the University Administration. Here in the U.S., a professor is the "king" of his own class.

We were faced with many cultural shocks in completing official forms, in choosing courses, but our professors of American Studies Project—Alan DeYoung and

Galina, Karen Mingst, and Robert Olson—mentored us in fulfilling all of our tasks, for example, in buying books and getting music and film CDs for my classes.

Studying at UK enriched my knowledge and experience in many ways. Students at UK can ask their professors any questions, which helps them to think critically, which is the main goal of teaching in the United States as I see it.

As a result of my work at UK, I now know many kinds of new methodologies. My teaching expertise has increased. In every class, I tried to take notes and memorize the different ways of teaching. There are many methods of making the subject interesting and challenging. Professors at UK might just give everyday life examples related to the day's topic, play some music before the class starts, talk about something just on the daily news that might be interesting to students; the list goes on . . .

I have learned many activities and teaching methods in the last four months. I like the method of showing films as the main activity in a class. A professor would usually ask us to watch the film before the class. There was a schedule for showings. And students can criticize the film, or can express their opinion about them. I will try to use this way of teaching for certain.

There are many teaching activities that UK professors use to encourage students to think, to know and to realize what they are doing. All these new methodologies had a great impact on my professional development. In order to make the classes interesting, a professor is always searching for new methods. Back home, I will strongly implement all the new methodologies I have obtained from my 4 month studying and experience in the United States.

During these four months, I worked to develop and collect some materials for my syllabi. I was supposed to develop two syllabi: 1) American Arts in Music and Film, 2) "Intercultural Communication". In order to work out my own syllabi, I had to pass many stages. I met with my professors, discussed my future intentions and purposes. They were very helpful.

In order to understand the American Culture and Music and Film in general, I attended several concerts, films, and cultural gatherings. There were many cultural events and experiences that we liked very much. The first event was when Professor Stan took us to Berea to see the West-African Music (The Gambian concert). The concert was some kind of a charity concert. There we found out that their music is so lively and makes people dance, even feel free. I have seen many concerts here: A Concert of World Music and Dance, The Bluegrass concert, The Halloween concert, and the Black Music Ensemble. All these cultural events helped me to understand how culture is rich and various in America, and how it can be different. In order to understand as much as possible, I have been to several kinds of churches in Kentucky: Shiloh Baptist Church, Central Christian Church, First Presbyterian and Maxwell Street Presbyterian Church. Religion is one of the most important and valuable things in America.

All of this made me to think about my religion too. Being Muslim, I have never imagined that people all over the world may have their own ways of worshipping and may have such a number of churches. That is the impact of the former Soviet Union that we do not have enough experience even with our own religion as in other Islamic countries like Jordan, Palestine, Egypt, etc. I met some representatives from there and had a chance to deeply understand the core of our own religion. Before coming to America, I could say that I know everything about our religion but it turned out that there

are many things that I have yet to know. The trip opened my eyes and my mind not only in the professional areas but also in my personal life too. Seeing all these Muslims from many different countries and who are practicing all the rules that are in our “holy” book “Koran”, it made me appreciate more my religion. The fact of seeing those Muslims in America, even some American women having converted their religion into Muslim religion made me to think about our religion too. This is one of the big impacts of my trip. I attended not only churches but Islamic gatherings just to differentiate and to understand how religion is important and a part of people’s life in America. It was an eye-opening experience.

I was lucky to see three seasons in America: summer, autumn, and winter. Obviously, I had a great opportunity to see how Americans celebrate the main holidays in these seasons. There were the holidays like “Labor Day”, “Halloween holiday”, “Thanksgiving day” and a preparation for Christmas. From my observation, I can say that all ages of Americans try to celebrate them with their children, family. They like to decorate their houses no matter what.

At UK there were many events organized for students. The university encourages students to come and participate, such as in the “Civic Literacy” seminar. This seminar was held for two days, and students were eager to do some service learning projects, to be good citizens. This seminar helped me to understand how it is important for the students to participate in these kinds of activities and freely express their ideas.

Another seminar was “The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy”. There were 2 presentations on “Culture as possibility of Symbolic Meaning” by Geeta Manaktala and “Religious Cinema: from the visible to the invisible”. All these presentations were useful, giving students two days of communicating with people from different countries and with different points of view. I will try to provide such kind of opportunities for my students and hold as many seminars as possible just to give them chances to see and understand and appreciate different cultural backgrounds to perceive different information.

I tried to attend and participate in the UK professors’ and other’s presentations. These were: 1) “Kentucky Rock Fences”—Professor Karl Reitz; 2) Jack Valenti’s presentation on his way of life and the future movies that are coming out; 3) “Devils and Humans: Some Reflections on the Recent anti-Japanism in China” by Leo Ching, Chair of Duke University’s Asian and African languages and Literature Department; 4) “America and China: Rivals or Both” by Patrick Mulloy; and 5) “Cross- Cultural Learning through Film: The China/ Appalshop Filmmakers Exchange”. These presentations helped me understand more about other cultures, other than the American Culture.

There were many cultural events that I attended, like The Homecoming in Berea, festival of handcrafts, Homecoming Parade in Berea to the 150 years of Berea College, Black Music Ensemble in the 70’s in the church, Keeneland (horse races), American football and basketball games, trip to Cincinnati, Louisville, Frankfort, and a trip to the Red River Gorge in the Eastern Kentucky. Going to Berea, we can say that it is a town of skilled people and their works are considered to be very valuable and expensive. All these things that I have mentioned above changed my worldview. My trip to America helped me to increase not only my professional growth but also my general view of America.