

Meeting of minds as Caucasus academics gather in Malmö

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EDUCATION. The field of Caucasus studies is growing stronger at Malmö University. A new course with case and field studies is introduced, and the university has been playing host to three visiting experts specialising in Caucasus.

The trio are made up of Georgian professors Alexandre Kukhianidze and Zaal Kikvidze who have been joined by Aytan Sadigova, a lecturer from Azerbaijan. Getting the three together is quite a feat as the courses themselves are taught completely online.

Caucasus Studies Zaal Kikvidze Aytan Sadigova Karina Vamling Alexandre Kukhianidze

Zaal Kikvidze, Aytan Sadigova, Karina Vamling and Alexandre Kukhianidze.

“As our courses are multi-disciplinary covering politics, culture and history it is very important for us to have strong contacts with scholars from the region. For area studies and to establish connections for field work then it is vital,” says Karina Vamling, Professor of Caucasus Studies, at the Faculty of Culture and Society at Malmö University.

A new course with field and case studies

Being able to have the three academics in the same room helps significantly in the preparations for the start of a new course; Caucasus - Field and Case Studies.

Due to the strong links established between Malmö University and Tbilisi State University (where Scandinavian studies is among the offered courses) as well as with many other academic institutions and local NGOs students are able to avail of meaningful field study trips.

“Georgia is a good starting point for field studies as it is more of a neutral zone. For instance a student could go there to do a study of internally displaced persons and interact with those affected. Getting the hands-on knowledge counts for a lot,” adds Vamling.

As is the input of Professor Alexandre Kukhianidze, a political scientist and well travelled scholar now back for his fifth visit to Malmö University. He says the course content is ideal for students who want to find out more about how events in the Caucasus have an impact internationally.

“For students who wish to work in the Caucasus in an international organisation then this course is quite useful as it covers the global aspects of the region as well as regional. For instance the politics over the transportation of oil, and state & nation building in the post Soviet period,” he says.

A region in focus

Professors Kikvidze and Kukhianidze are both visiting from Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. Kukhianidze’s visit is funded by the Linneaus-Palme program whereas Kikvidze and Sadigova participate in Erasmus Mundus exchange programs.

Given the recent geopolitical crisis involving Russia there is a greater interest than ever in the Caucasus. Student applications for the current semester have spiked as a result.

“The whole region is in focus as a result of the situation with Russia and Ukraine of which there are parallels regarding developments in the Caucasus. The course has grown quite steadily,” says Vamling.

Typically, students use the courses in conjunction with another program to gain specialist knowledge about the Caucasus region.

Apart from the area studies courses, it is also possible to study an online course in the Georgian language. In the past both the Swedish and British ambassadors to Tbilisi have studied Georgian at Malmö University.

“I remember after giving one of my lectures a Swedish student began speaking to me in fluent Georgian. That indicated to me that this course is not just a course for itself but something that makes people decide the future steps in their lives,” says Professor Zaal Kikvidze, Chief Research Fellow, at Tbilisi State University.

Kukhianidze, Kikvidze and Sadigova will remain in Malmö for the next 1-3 months to continue their collaborative work with current courses and the new course in tandem with Vamling.

Text: [Patrick Reilly](#)

Read more

- [Caucasus Studies I](#) begins again on January 19th 2015. This is also the starting date for the new course [Caucasus Field and Case Studies](#). Deadline for entries is October 15th.
- As both the area studies and the language course are based on distance learning it suits students who wish to combine it with another area of study, as well as people already working in the region.

[Courses in Caucasus Studies](#)

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