

aid, make the biggest profits. I promised that I could help after I return home to see what the group is actually accomplishing.

The other day at a library talk I gave on Nepal, I was asked by an elderly lady if kids ever go to school in Nepal. I was living proof of that. But some misconceptions about faraway lands never seem to diminish.



Deepak Adhikari in Pittsburgh

During my time in Pittsburgh, from 8,000 miles away I saw my country descend into chaos. I left a monarchy and will return to a constitutional republic without a constitution. It took three months for the elected members of the constituent assembly just to pick a president.

Still, it was a thrill to see on the Post-Gazette international page -- my favorite -- a picture of Ram

Baran Yadav, a physician from a farming family in the southern plains, as he was installed as the first elected president of the Republic of Nepal.

Gradually, Nepal seems to be making headway as it forms a new government, but the process is often frustrating. I remain an optimist, which is not always easy.

Recently, when I spoke with my father, a schoolteacher in Phidim, he asked me what I was bringing home. What came to my mind first was: knowledge. And, of course, experience.

Living in Pittsburgh and working with the best people in the news business has been remarkable. I shall cherish this sojourn always. Thank you, Pittsburgh.

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Why study in Finland: RAMK, SAMK, and PBL

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In September 2011, I visited two universities in Finland as part of Magellan faculty exchange: Rovaniemi University of Applied Sciences in Pori (RAMK) and Satakunta University of Applied Sciences in Pori and Rauma (SAMK). It was such a wonderful and rewarding trip that I decided to share my experience with students to encourage them to study abroad.

Arkansas State University is a member of Magellan Exchange Program (<http://www.magellanexchange.org/>). The mission of this program is "to provide opportunities for students and faculty to have an affordable educational and cultural immersion experience." I decided to apply for this exchange to foster my professional development and to establish new contacts for cross-cultural collaboration in my area of research.

There are currently about 20 member institutions in the program from 11 countries outside of the USA. One of the reasons that I chose Finland is because I teach positive psychology and Northern European countries are among the happiest places in the world. The most recent studies of psychological, social, and economic



well-being put Finland close to the top of the list. It boasts an excellent education system and social services, high living standards, booming industry, and low crime and corruption rates. It is sparsely populated and offers breathtaking forests, lakes, and rivers for hiking, trekking, or canoeing.

Irina Khramtsova received her doctoral degree in Educational Psychology from Kansas State University, and her B.A. in Philology from Moscow State University, Russia. She conducts research in the area of positive psychology, in particular, on mindfulness and more recently on unity or oneness consciousness.

Photo: A Man in Aboriginal Dress of Finland with Reindeer

Traveling in the country is very easy and you do not need a car because buses and trains can take you to any remote place such as the Santa Claus residence in Rovaniemi. Within the city you can walk or bike like most of the Finnish students do even when it snows.

Living in Finland is not cheap (mostly because of high taxation) but college students there enjoy lots of privileges and discounts on transportation, museum entrance, etc. University cafeteria lunch costs only 2.5 euros and consists of a choice of salads, main dish, and drinks: piima (sour milk), coffee, or juice. Food in Finland is wonderful, healthy and fresh, coffee is delicious, and in the summer and fall you can pick your own berries and mushrooms in the forests and parks.



Helsinki, Capital City of Finland

Finnish language is very difficult for foreigners to study because it is very unique and does not belong to the Indo-European group like English or other popular languages, but both RAMK and SAMK offer many courses in English. Outside of the university, you may want to know some basic vocabulary but most Finns know English, fairly well. They may be shy to speak it but when they do –after they apologize that it is not very good- they use correct grammar and rich vocabulary. They do not smile as much as Americans but they will always help you if you are lost. But you will not be lost once you learn some basic vocabulary in Finnish as there are lots of signs telling you the way to “kuska” (city center) or other parts of town.

I felt very welcome at both RAMK and SAMK: my lectures on positive psychology and mindfulness were received with enthusiasm by students and faculty, my Finnish colleagues were great hosts, and I was honored by being invited to their homes and even to the sauna.

I thought that Finnish people were friendly and trusting. I do not like to generalize based on one’s limited experience but here is one example of what my

judgment is based on. When traveling on a train from Rovaniemi to Pori, I ordered my ticket online but was unable to print it at home and hoped that I could do it at the train station. I was unable to print it in spite of my heroic efforts to understand the Finnish messages on the screen of the ticket machine. The ticket office was closed and the passengers who could understand Finnish were unable to help me. I was a little worried when I got on the train with a piece of scratch paper where I wrote my confirmation number and some other information about my train ride. I explained to the conductor who of course spoke excellent English what had happened. It seemed like she had no way to check if I was telling the truth or not, so she just asked me to confirm that I did pay for the ticket. I said yes and she wrote something in Finnish on my piece of paper which I presented later to two other conductors who did not ask me any questions.

Both RAMK and SAMK have adopted an innovative teaching method called problem-based learning (PBL). It is a type of student-centered pedagogy in which students learn about a subject in the context of complex, real-life problems. The obvious advantage of this method is that students are actively involved in the learning process, they work on practical application of their knowledge, and for international students, an additional benefit is less dependency on language and more on hands-on problems.

An example of this approach for those who study business is an Enterprise Accelerator at Satakunta University of Applied Sciences (http://www.samk.fi/research_and_development/enterprise_accelerator). This is an innovative pedagogical approach combining regular degree coursework with starting a new business and becoming an entrepreneur.

For those in the nursing program, there is the Virtual Center of Wellness (ENVI) which I toured at RAMK (<http://www.ramk.fi/en/>). This unit consists of treatment equipment, patient simulators, and IT software. It can create a real-life multi-sensory incident surroundings including 3-D graphics, weather effects, sounds, and environment and future nurses can practice their skills and receive immediate feedback to their actions.

If exchange students are not willing to commit to a whole semester in Finland and do not enjoy cold weather or winter sports, the international summer school in Pori or Rovaniemi is an excellent option. I do not know at this time what will be offered in summer of 2012, but there were some interesting courses in May and June this year such as “Nature Trek in Lapland” or “Russia as Business and Cooperation Region (including an excursion to St. Petersburg).”