

Professor aids election

Ishiyama observes polling sites in Azerbaijan helps prevent fraud attempts

Salma Ahmed
Staff Reporter

Sitting with a laptop on his couch at home, John Ishiyama, professor of political science and McNair program director, received an e-mail from a colleague asking to help watch the polls during the parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan, a country north of Iran.

"I had to reschedule things," Ishiyama said. "After talking with my students and others, I realized that they all thought I should go. My wife and I travel abroad a lot, so for us it was like just another trip I was going on."

Former Gov. Bob Holden and former Missouri Secretary of State Bekki Cook joined Ishiyama. He said that although his team of 12 was from a private organization, other groups, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, brought more than 500 election

observers. The Commonwealth of Independent States brought another couple hundred election observers to Azerbaijan. The election observers spread out among 125 different districts and more than 500 precincts.

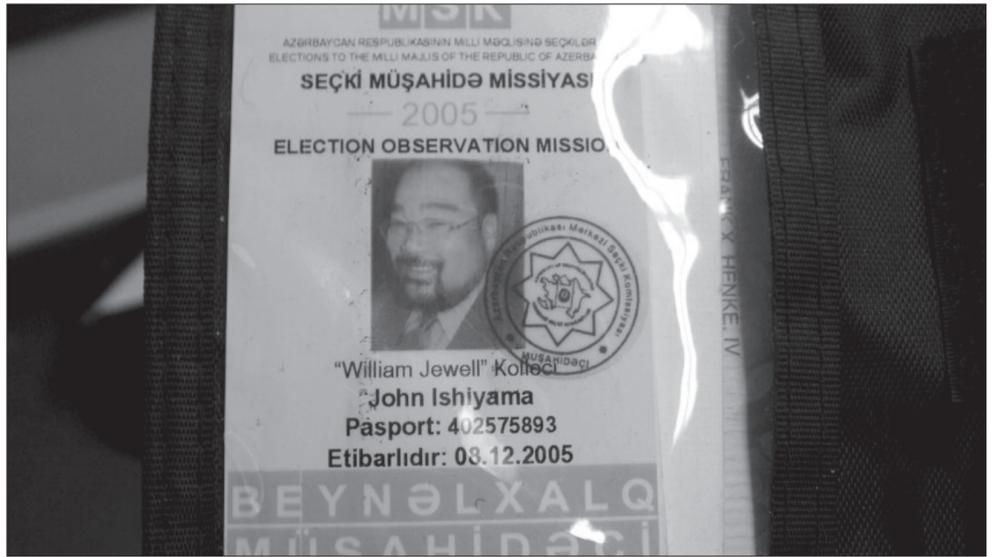
"Our team covered 13 election districts and 52 precincts," Ishiyama said.

Ishiyama said that with this much work to do, his team had no time for sight-seeing or other tourist activities. The team worked for the five days it spent in Azerbaijan.

"We spent time interviewing officials and deciding what precincts we would visit," Ishiyama said. "We had a driver take us to visit the different precincts, and he would drive at about 120 kilometers per hour, and we covered a lot of the east coast of the country that way."

When observing the polling sites, Ishiyama and his team did not see any fraud attempts, although some intimidators outside the polling areas pressured people to vote for their parties. Ishiyama said witnessing the election in Azerbaijan left an impression on him.

"The thing that impressed me the most was how democracy emerges," Ishiyama



John Ishiyama, professor of political science, shows off his identification badge that he used during the election

said. "These are the things we read about but few people actually witness firsthand."

Not only did the elections show a new attempt at democracy, but the conditions and the way people cast their votes also were different than in most other countries.

"There was a wooden booth with drawstrings and was held together by twisty-ties," Ishiyama said. "They didn't have a computer or punch cards. They

had a piece of paper and a pencil."

Ishiyama said his experience in Azerbaijan affected his classes positively because he had many stories to tell when he got back. His students said his absence did not set back the class discussions and lectures.

"I'm in his comparative politics class, and he's an excellent professor," junior David Bonner said. "He gets done what

he needs to do and only missed one day of class, so it didn't affect anything."

Not only did he enjoy it, but Ishiyama also said he would be less likely to pass up another chance at witnessing a country become a democracy.

"It helps to put things in perspective," said Marijke Breuning, Ishiyama's wife and professor of political science. "If he had another chance, he'd do it again."

Committee will release report after reviewing minors

Emily Finnegan
for the Index

Although minors are a secondary area of academic study, they are not minor details.

An Undergraduate Council Committee began reviewing the University's minors program at the start of the semester. A comprehensive report of all will be released before the end of the academic year.

Truman has issued 6,125 minors to students since 1991, according to a recently compiled list of minors granted by the University. Undergraduate Council chairman Scott Alberts said the first minors were awarded in the 1991 academic year.

Today Truman offers 48 minors, and the increase in number and addition of interdisciplinary minors caused the need for the UGC review, he said.

"Minors have exploded," Alberts said. "There are tons more

minors than there used to be. A lot of the rules we have kind of made for minors worked really well when there were a couple of them, but now we have some minors we are giving out 50, 100 a year, and that is not something we even dreamed of."

One portion of the minors program involves determining a permanent divisional home for the interdisciplinary minors, Alberts said. In 1995, University policy began mandating that all minors be based out of a specific division, he said.

Interdisciplinary minors, which span multiple divisions, were overseen by committees comprising representatives from all involved academic areas

but were based out of only one of the involved divisions, Alberts said. Within the last few years, some minors, like environmental studies, have requested not to have a divisional home. Those minors have been housed temporarily in the office of interdisciplinary studies, he said.

"On the one hand, there's an advantage to being under interdisciplinary studies because it makes sense, and you don't have to feel like you are kind of smushing it into a division where it doesn't make sense," he said.

"On the other hand, since the money is in all the divisions, having a home has an advantage because you always know there is a bed there."

"It's just kind of a general quality control. Maybe the field has changed. Maybe something about our students has changed."

Scott Alberts
Undergraduate Council
Chairman

Senior Lukin Murphy said he thinks developing a more concrete system for the organization of interdisciplinary minors is necessary. Murphy, an international studies minor, said he had some difficulties getting his minor worksheet signed.

"I went to interdisciplinary to get it done, and they couldn't do it, so they sent me to someone else on the oversight committee," he said. "I think the guidelines for getting everything approved are vague."

The UGC committee's work has the potential to be really beneficial to students, Murphy said.

"I think it will be helpful to review how the minor is administered, to clear up any ambiguities and make sure everything is really lined up for students," he said.

It is more difficult to make adjustments to a minor than it is to make changes to a major, Alberts said.

"Minors have to get approved by

a variety of other bodies even if they are not interdisciplinary," he said. "It comes from the idea that while your majors are your students, your minors are actually someone else's students."

Some minors are assessed every five years in conjunction with their corresponding majors, and others aren't assessed at all and haven't been since their conceptions, Alberts said.

"It's just kind of a general quality control," he said. "Maybe the field has changed. Maybe something about our students has changed."

Lesa Ketterlinus, director of the Career Center, said minors can be very beneficial for some students, depending on their individual interests and goals and what employers and graduate schools are looking for.

"I think [a minor] speaks to your curiosity and your breadth of interest and that kind of thing," Ketterlinus said. "I think that's one of the

things that is attractive to graduate schools. I'm hearing from the students that [graduate schools] do like the diversity of interests student have, so a minor sometimes just helps to make you more well-rounded."

Minors can serve as an additional indicator for employers of what skills students will contribute to the work environment.

"I think what the minor then does, it says to the employer that you have an interest in another field," she said. "It says, 'I have enough interest in this field to minor in it,' and I think it makes you stand out more so than some other students would."

Ketterlinus said minors can be vital in creating the educational program for some specific fields.

"Sometimes students can't really get exactly what they want without a major and minor combination," she said. "Sometimes you really need that combination."

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