

# FLTAs Use Music and Culture to Supplement Courses in Major World Languages

By Aris Dravillas

Buge Karpazli and Patrecia Sianipar sit side-by-side at a table in the Old Capitol Mall, two dark-haired women blending in with other students who are studying, chatting, or eating. The two young women look like average friends meeting for a late lunch, but they are actually preparing to do something that has never been done on the University of Iowa campus: teach intensive Turkish and Indonesian language classes.

UI students had the opportunity to take courses on these less commonly taught languages for the first time during the Spring 2007 semester. Karpazli and Sianipar came to the UI through the Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA) program, sponsored by International Programs.



Buge Karpazli (left) and Patrecia Sianipar (right) at the Iowa State Fair in August 2006 with George Jenkins of the Diamond J Ranch, North Platte, Nebraska. Photo: Kathryn Henry

## Buge Karpazli

“This is a unique opportunity to learn Turkish from a native speaker and learn more about the culture,” the 24-year-old Karpazli said.

Karpazli is teaching extensive Turkish culture to her students, including differences such as how they sit and talk while in class.

“I’m not going to teach the culture like a lecture, but there are some things you can show the students, like the body language and the gestures and the respect and the formality,” she said.

Karpazli said she plans to have her students mimic Turkish mannerisms and habits.

“We tend to stare more than people here, and sometimes they consider it inappropriate when actually it is totally normal,” she said. “We kiss each other on the cheek. We raise our eyebrows to say ‘no.’ ”

Using the Internet in her daily life was a new experience, but incorporating Web techniques and other multimedia sources are teaching approaches Karpazli will take back to her career in Cyprus.

“We are far behind, but there are a lot of things that I can bring to the education system about language teaching,” she said. “The more time I spend online, the more comfortable I feel.”

Karpazli is also learning something more general and valuable than Internet skills.

“We are learning American culture,” she said. “I’m experiencing totally different celebration days, going out and making friends, meeting people from all around the world, and taking classes and learning more.”

The activities, she said, “make me feel at home. A quiet place, organized, the people are friendly, warm, kind—they are so nice to support you. I love it.”

William Reisinger, UI associate provost and dean of International Programs, praised the eagerness, dedication to language, and previous teaching experience of the two instructors and noted the importance of the FLTA program.

“I am very proud of the leadership role that International Programs plays in expanding the language-learning opportunities available to UI students and community members. Language learning is a critical part of the University’s larger internationalization goals,” Reisinger said.

In addition to the FLTA program, International Programs is home to the UI’s Autonomous Language Learning Network (ALLNet) and the Confucius Institute, which offers courses in Chinese to the public. International Programs has also made possible the teaching of Arabic, Croatian, Czech, Polish, and Uzbek in collaboration with the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Iowa’s other Regents universities, and other Big Ten universities.

Besides teaching, Karpazli is working on her Master of Arts in English education. After a year at the UI, she plans to return to Cyprus.

“I am planning to come back to (the states) and continue my studies, or go to other countries and do what I’m doing right now,” she said.

“Hopefully there will be a permanent program for more people and more students,” Karpazli said of the less commonly taught languages and the FLTA program at the UI. “And through my class, I hope that more people know about my country.”

## Patrecia Sianipar

Unlike commonly offered languages such as Spanish or French, Sianipar realizes that Indonesian is especially foreign.

“The students who are motivated to learn my language are really, really interested in Indonesia,” the 29-year-old said. “It’s different than learning something like Spanish, because it is not an obligation or a requirement. It takes a real goal and willingness to learn.”

Hoping to effectively impart her language and culture to students in her Intensive Indonesian class, Sianipar uses an interactive Web site with both traditional and contemporary examples of Indonesian music to help her students understand and recognize the language.

“I created exercises to develop their reading and listening skills through Indonesian music, both popular and traditional,” she explained. “It will help their vocabulary.”

Sianipar, who hails from the Indonesian capital, Jakarta, was shocked at the noise level—or more precisely, the lack of noise—when she first came to Iowa City.

“It felt very different from Jakarta, which is very crowded, and here it is very silent,” she said. “So the first time, I felt like I was in a village with not many people. But when time went by, I started to like it.”

Sianipar taught English to high school students in Indonesia after completing her undergraduate and master’s degrees. She then taught Indonesian in South Korea for two years.

When Sianipar learned she was coming to the UI, she consulted a friend who had already studied here. “She told me a lot about Iowa City—that it was really cold, even worse than New York,” she said.

Besides preparing for teaching class and her own graduate courses, twice a week Sianipar sits in on a linguistics class, which is her area of interest.

“I do translations from English to Indonesian,” she said. “Then they analyze my language and the grammar. It is a little problematic because Indonesian is so easy!”

Sianipar said the language, which is spoken by about 200 million people worldwide, has no intonations, tenses, or stresses, making it relatively easy to learn.

James Pusack, associate professor of German and director of the FLTA Critical Languages Program, said the classes taught through the program are an important addition to the UI’s course offerings.

“Business, political, and research needs for foreign language expertise evolve far more quickly than our curriculum can,” he said. “The Fulbright program gives us the ability to adapt in a timely fashion, while commitments from International Programs make it possible to train and supervise these visiting scholars. That ensures high-quality instruction while introducing the UI community to new languages each year.”

“We are usually together.”

Patrecia Sianipar, of Indonesia, on the close bond she shares with fellow teaching assistant Buge Karpazli, of Cyprus, due to shared experiences in a new country and their teaching endeavors at the UI.

For more information on ALLNet, visit:  
[www.uiowa.edu/~allnet](http://www.uiowa.edu/~allnet)