

Students send textbooks to Afghanistan

Kabul Medical Library destroyed after years of conflict

by Kristine Owram

EDMONTON (CUP) — Thanks to the efforts of students, professors, and librarians at the University of Alberta and across the country, medical students in Kabul will soon have almost 1,000 new textbooks in their library.

Started by University of Manitoba radiology professor Dr. Richard Gordon, the Kabul Medical Library Project aims to send as many of the textbooks named in the Brandon/Hill essential medical library list as possible to the Afghan city.

The Kabul Medical Library was depleted and damaged during years of conflict and instability in Afghanistan.

"The details on it are actually really vague, but it was already in ruins under the Taliban regime, and when the war came about, the whole library was destroyed," explained medical student Vishal Anand, a local organizer and executive member of the U of A's International Healthcare Initiatives for Medical Students.

"They always refer to this one encyclopedia that had bullet holes through it. That's indicative of the state of the Kabul Medical Library," said Anand.

According to Anand, the medical students involved in the project at the U of M soon realized it was too large to take on themselves, so they contacted the other English-speaking medical schools in the country and gave each school a target of 50 to 70 textbooks.

The U of A exceeded that goal long ago, and expects to contribute over 200 books, thanks to the efforts of the John W Scott Health Sciences Library and medical students, past and present, throughout the city.

Approximately \$350 has been raised to pay for the costs of shipping the books to Winnipeg.

"It actually worked out really well," said Anand. "We decided to contact the Professional Association of Residents of Alberta."

"If, for example, you're a resident in cardiology, you no longer need your gastrointestinal textbook, it's no longer relevant to what you're doing. So we had huge amounts of donations from residents at hospitals, which was really great," he said.

The textbooks are all in English, but according to Anand this is not a problem. Medical training in Afghanistan is traditionally in English, so this will not be a change from the few books currently left in the library.

Most of the textbooks have already been sent to Manitoba, and Gordon hopes to have them sorted and sent to Afghanistan by May.

"It's been a frustrating experience. Last year I was fourth in line to ship up to 26 000 pounds of stuff with the Canadian military, but then we pulled out of the country," he laughed.

"Since then we have gone back in, but we're obviously not their top priority."

Despite frustrations and setbacks, however, those involved are excited about helping their fellow medical students in need.

"If educating the people of Afghanistan is going to be the priority to help work through the war, then you're going to have to provide them the resources to facilitate their education, so that's the primary goal," said Anand.

Denise Koufogiannakis, collections manager at the John W Scott Library, agreed.

"Especially in this day and age, you need access to information to really move things forward," she said.

According to Gordon, those at Kabul University have been "overwhelmed" by the project.

"They have a library with 300 books in it that are about 30 years old. What would you do as a physician if you were stuck with that for an education?"

Site includes a paper analyzing latrines of old

by Robin Collum

EDMONTON (CUP) — A curator at the Provincial Museum of Alberta has opened herself up to ridicule from four-year-olds everywhere by creating a catalogue of more than 250 pieces of research about preserved excrement.

The Dung File is a bibliography of research about animal and plant remains found in latrines, as well as feces from archaeological and paleoenvironmental sites. It was created by Alwynne Beaudoin, a curator at the museum and a joint faculty member at the University of Alberta.

For a student taking archaeology, paleontology, nutrition, parasitology and other disciplines, such a site could prove highly useful. Thanks to the site, research that could take days to track down is now catalogued in one convenient location.

Beaudoin created the site after a number of her students, working on related research, all had trouble finding information.

"I didn't have a lot of literature to help them. They were bringing material back from the library, but it was all from really obscure sources,

places where you wouldn't think to look. It took them a lot of searching," Beaudoin said.

"I thought it would be useful to pull together what they'd done and put it in a bibliography, so future students wouldn't have to go through the whole process again."

To ensure top quality, Beaudoin reads every piece of research before she adds it to the Dung File. For most of the references that are on the site, she has appended a summary or recommendation to help the reader in their search.

The references on the site include a paper comparing the latrines from different classes in a 19th-century Michigan town, an analysis of a Roman centurion's diet in first-century Netherlands, evidence for cannibalism in prehistoric Colorado, and the study of honeybee feces in southeast Asia.

The study of dung and other remains provides a lot of information about ancient organisms and their habits. Knowing exactly what an animal ate explains things scientists could only speculate on if they relied on traditional archaeological evidence. It is particularly helpful when studying extinct species, like the woolly mammoth.

In terms of human study, latrine samples offer invaluable insight into the diet, nutrition, and health of the



Gross! Fossilized feces can teach us about neat things, like parasites!

humans who left it. Archaeobotanists can learn what parasites attacked ancient peoples, and research can also indicate some of their habits. For example, scientists can determine the time of year that an archaeological site was used by examining the amount and type of pollen in the fecal matter left behind by its inhabitants.

Currently, there are approximately 250 references on the site, but Beaudoin says she has at least 200

more waiting to be entered as soon as she has time to read them.

Still, the site regularly gets over 400 hits a month, which surprises its creator, considering its specialized nature.

"Much to my bemusement, I am probably better known for compiling the Dung File than for any of my other research," said Beaudoin.

View The Dung File at <http://Scirpus.ca/dung/dung.shtml>.

Sex-trade workers' rights: critic

Former prostitute calls for criminal code change

by Hywel Tuscano

VANCOUVER (CUP) — Sex-trade workers have been stigmatized, demonized, maimed and murdered for far too long, says a long-time advocate for the rights of sex-trade workers.

Jamie Lee Hamilton was drawn into prostitution in 1969 at the age of 14 and has been a witness to much of the activity on Vancouver's streets. Drawing upon experience from her involvement in the queer/transgendered community, activism and the sex trade, she was outspoken about the need for rights for sex-trade workers at a recent conference at UBC.

She is lobbying for the abolishment of a section in the criminal code that prohibits communicating for the purpose of prostitution in a public place and another section that bans the existence or use of common bawdy houses—"any place used for the purpose of prostitution or the practice of acts of indecency."

Prostitution itself is legal and is usually propagated through massage parlours or escort services.

Hamilton said these codes criminalize sex-trade workers and not those who are actually making the streets dangerous.

"Sex-trade workers are not criminals. Places where workers work should not be criminalised either," she said.

Hamilton admits to running a safe house for sex-trade workers and was charged with running a common bawdy house in August 2000.

"There is nothing common about it," she said in response to the charges.

But there are many opponents to giving rights to sex-trade workers. Groups like the Coalition Against the Trafficking of Women deem prostitution "exploitative of women, regardless of consent."

The local Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter is also strongly opposed to prostitution, but could not comment by press time.

Hamilton's resolve to eliminate the codes is fuelled by startling statistics and the loss of personal friends.

Between 1985 and 1993 over 63

sex-trade workers were murdered. When murderers were caught, their sentences were paltry, she said.

"There was a dramatic increase of the victimisation of sex trade workers—just over five a year. If that were happening to any other segment of the population there would be outrage. But because we were sex workers I guess those that were in power thought they could do whatever they wanted to do us," said Hamilton.

The DTES Residents' Association realized that many women were going missing in the Downtown Eastside in 1997-1998.

Hamilton filed a Freedom of Information request to the Vancouver Police Department and it was revealed on March 2, 1999 that 22 women had disappeared in one year. A local pig farmer, Robert Pickton, is now facing murder charges for 22 women from the DTES. The DNA of up to 31 women has been found at his Port Coquitlam farm.

While both sides fight for either abolishment or decriminalization it is very clear that the streets remain dangerous, said Hamilton.

"Sex workers are still very, very vulnerable and still are being victimized," she said.

Hamilton's keynote address was part of UBC's first Sexuality and Gender diversity conference, called Resolutions and Ruptures.

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