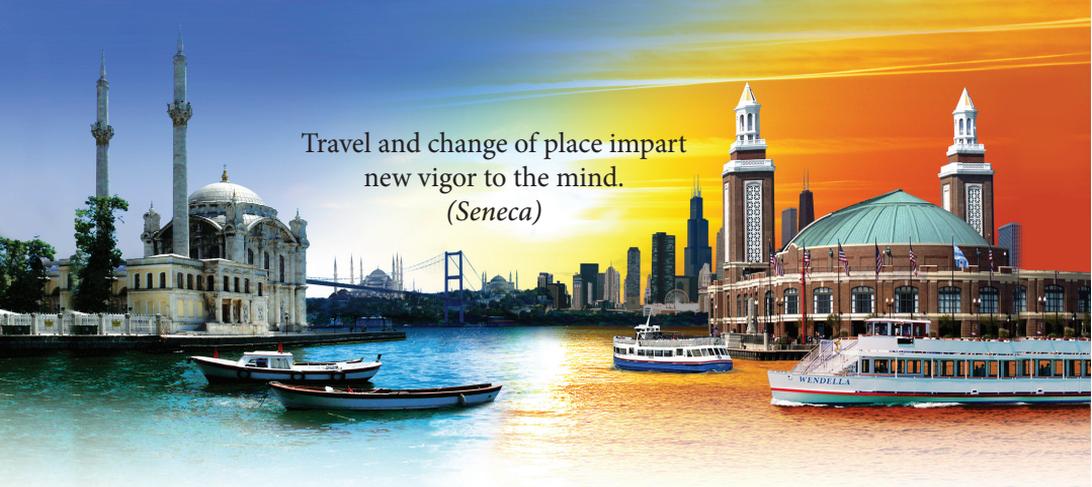




Study Türkiye 2011

GROUP JOURNAL



Travel and change of place impart
new vigor to the mind.
(*Seneca*)

The group of community college faculty who traveled to Turkey in Summer 2011 left as strangers and came back as friends, to each other and to the Turkish educators and families who hosted them in Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir. The group was enriched by the friendships they made and the experiences they had in Turkey. They returned enthralled by Turkish culture and history and were awed by Turkish politics as they witnessed the 2011 Presidential election from front row seats.

They were the first group of community college educators the Niagara Foundation sponsored in a pilot program to develop curricula focused on Turkey. Hopefully, it is the first of many more Study Türkiye groups to follow.

The 2011 participants were:

Prof. Oksana Alfredson – Joliet Jr. College
Prof. Carol Baxter – Parkland College
Dr. Patricia Delwiche – Kishwaukee College
Prof. Sherry Engstrom – Gateway Technical College/College of Lake County
Prof. Jackie Kaufman – Elgin Community College
Prof. Mary Price – College of Lake County
Dr. Anthony Thomas – Kishwaukee College

The group was led by Mevlut Hilmi Cinar, Associate Director of the Niagara Foundation Chicago, and Dr. Zinta Konrad, Advisory Board Member of the Niagara Foundation Chicago and President of the ZK Consulting Intl.

Sincere thanks to Dr. Serif Soydan, Executive Director of the Niagara Foundation Chicago, for his support of this project, to Mevlut Hilmi Cinar who enthusiastically and lovingly shared with the group his country and his culture, to Hakan Berberoglu, Assistant Director of the Niagara Foundation Chicago for his invaluable help with planning the itinerary for this trip, to the wonderful faculty participants who were a joy to be with, and to Tony Thomas, who graciously volunteered to edit the final version of this Journal.

This Journal is the story of the group's collective adventure in Turkey in 2011. It is the story of discovery- -discovery of self, discovery of Turkey, and discovery of new vistas of the mind- as Seneca so aptly observed.

Zinta Konrad
Chicago/October 2011

EXCERPTS FROM THE GROUP JOURNAL STUDY TÜRKIYE—JUNE 2011

Sunday, June 5, 2011: Arriving in Istanbul

We went for a ride in the van with Hilmi and all to the rally for the Prime Minister (elections are this week) – we met the Prime Minister of Turkey and his wife. (Oh yes we did.) Apparently Hilmi is close friends with a variety of politicians in Turkey. He didn't want to tell us ahead that that was his plan – for us to meet him (the P.M.) in case it didn't work out. This was – I tell you – an act of God with excellent timing! This group of teachers had only met as a group about 45 minutes ahead of the command by Hilmi – “Move, move, move!” and we did and had a spectacular, once-in-a-lifetime experience! We were all standing on the stairway to the huge stage he (the Prime Minister) had just been speaking on. What a brilliant plan – executed to perfection!

Then we had our first meal together. It was spectacular – lots of salads and bread and then meat (lamb / chicken) all so delicious, with cherry soda/juice and chai. The dessert was also amazing – very sweet with creamy vanilla (unusual consistency) ice cream. Then back to our hotel. The conversation at dinner was a lovely group process of Hilmi setting the stage for our time together, us all getting to know each other, and Hilmi giving us some insights and explanations of Niagara.

I feel so very blessed to have this opportunity – to travel with smart, adventurous people and have some AMAZINGLY amazing experiences!

Monday, June 6, 2011: Istanbul

This morning we rode in the van north to the impressively new Fatih University. We enjoyed (dare I say) two informative lectures – one on Turkish history, and the other one on the Turkish press. We enjoyed tea and cherry juice in a comfortable, air-conditioned seminar room. For lunch, we ate in a room of the cafeteria that overlooked new houses, fields and the water.

We returned to our explorations of Istanbul in the afternoon. We began at Topkapi Palace. We met our day-long tour guide, Aykut, outside the first gates. We were amazed at the numerous red roses and tall sycamore and cedar trees. Aykut was an exceptionally knowledgeable guide who knew how to feed our interest with all sorts of intriguing tidbits of information.

Many of us were in awe of the jewelry. Part way through the jewelry exhibit, we came out on a balcony that overlooked the blue waters of the Bosphorus. The day could not have been more pleasant.

Hilmi took us to an unbelievably well-situated restaurant for a full dinner. To our west, the Blue Mosque dominated the hill. To our east, we overlooked the sea filled with tankers, cruise lines and other ships. We again enjoyed bread, buttered cheese, various tasty meats, etc. Following tea, we walked down narrow streets with all sorts of amazing shops filled with

rugs, glassware or sweets. For once in my life, I wished we had some time to shop! But we had to get to a performance of whirling dervishes.

I had the impression that dervishes rotate quickly – but this was a calm, spinning dance that caused the dancers' skirts to flow in quiet waves as they spun around. It was as entrancing to the viewer as it is for the dancer!

I am very grateful to be having such a total immersion in Turkish culture. I believe that this trip is creating a significant new awareness that is part and parcel of Niagara's mission of fostering inter-cultural dialogue.

Tuesday, June 7, 2011: Istanbul

Toured the magnificent Hagia Sophia Museum, the jewel in the long and spectacular history of Istanbul, built during the reign of Constantine (324-327), and completed in 360. ... The grace of Islamic captors after 1453 is revealed in the preservation of Christian iconography.

Dr. Ahmet Muharrem Atlig, Project Coordinator for the Journalists and Writers Foundation, formed a warm and immediate rapport with our group....He focused on the grass roots momentum behind his movement as well as that of youth. He was among the most well-received speakers in memory.

On the Asian side of Istanbul, Hilmi arranged an incredible surprise. We were privileged to cruise the Bosphorus. Along the waters we enjoyed the most lovely and inspiring debriefing session ever imagined. Yet another splendor of this ancient city was revealed along its shores between two continents as Asia is linked to Europe.

A day full of learning and wonder to be remembered into the future.

Wednesday, June 8, 2011: Istanbul

It's been another wonderful, stimulating day.

After gathering our luggage and leaving the hotel, we went to visit the Zaman newspaper. The business editor, Mustafa Edib Yilmaz, gave a frank and interesting talk about economics, business and of particular interest, journalism in Turkey. I think we came away with an understanding of the fascinating and brave work of a journalist in Turkey.

I am really tired. Long day – loved it all

Thursday, June 9, 2011: Ankara

This day opened and closed with our debriefing sessions. The first session took place in our hotel with a gracious statement from Zinta saying that she enjoyed how all of the travelers are compatible and amiable. So far so good – we do all seem to get along and genuinely enjoy our new friendships. The evening debriefing took place outside after a savory feast and invigorating walk in a hilly section of Ankara. Between these bookends was a satisfying day of cultural richness.

Tour of Parliament: the grandeur of the building was impressive, especially the embossed, golden doors that President Obama walked thru a year or two ago, as Hilmi pointed out. Our tour was enjoyable, led by a young Turkish woman, stylishly dressed in Western style pants and top accented by a wide belt decorated with brass rivets. She described the MP's assembly room in Turkish, as Hilmi translated. This was a richly visual experience due to the spectrum of orange colors covering the seats.

Ataturk's Mausoleum and Museum: this was a truly enjoyable experience for me in every way. All the open space under the blue sky had a spiritual, tranquilizing effect. The history museum, video and mausoleum were all very informative. I found the life of Ataturk, about whom I knew very little, inspiring.

Hilmi took us out for a divine dining experience. As soon as we arrived, I knew we were in for a true Turkish delight. The ambience was breathtaking – both inside and out, where we had a savory feast of salad with lettuce and herbs, lamb, warm pita bread and a dessert to die for. The last act was an ethnically dressed handsome and charming Turk who served dibek coffee – a Kurdish coffee, similar to Turkish coffee. After eating, we took an aerobic walk up and down the hilly region, complete with outdoor exercise equipment. Several of us enjoyed our adult playground and wished Americans were as clever as Turks with respect to this vigorous invention.

Friday, June 10, 2011: Ankara

We left on the bus for a 9:00 lecture at Turgut Ozal University where our host from yesterday, Dr. Lutfu Sagbansua, met us and ushered us in. Lecturer was Gunar Ozkan (PhD), from a think tank called USAK (International Strategic Research Organization). His topic was "Turkey as a regional power, Turkey's relationship with the US, and Turkey and the EU." He was clearly a brilliant thinker and incredibly well-informed. His presentation was well organized and he didn't make the mistake of presuming too much about our background knowledge.

We had lunch in the faculty dining room, a beautifully furnished room with purple upholstered chairs, plush purple drapes and sheer lacy curtains. There were linen table cloths but still the curious tiny paper napkins. The menu was an interesting variation on previous meals – a corn/tomato/cabbage salad, lentil soup; the main course was a delicious pea stew with beef, and a cheesy pastry....

Next stop a modern mall. If you didn't read the signs, you would hardly know the difference from a mall in Omaha or Cincinnati.

The fellow who was hosting dinner made a wonderful request of us. As part of an educational / literacy project, he asked us to select a poem, any poem, and read it aloud and record it. He has a website where people can hear poems being read. A related project is getting people to read aloud and record entire books, for the visually impaired and some other groups.

Saturday, June 11, 2011: Ankara

Professor Atakan-Duman's presentation [entitled "Business Environment and Business Ethics in Turkey"] was very well organized and clearly structured.

After the formal part of Professor Atakan-Duman's presentation, she graciously took questions on women's issues. Participants eagerly asked about issues because she was the first woman to address the group formally. Questions regarding aspirations of Turkish women, marriage, childbirth, homosexuality, and social standards for women were freely answered.

The late afternoon offered some much needed discretionary time for participants. We ended with a simple intimate dinner prepared by the hotel, with lovely presents for us all from our host at the Baklavaci restaurant.

Sunday, June 12, 2011: Izmir

Izmir met us with warm wind and blooming oleanders. Warm and sweet was our tour guide Serkan Sahin. He directed us to a comfortable bus, took care of our luggage, and our colorful Izmir adventure started. While we were getting on our bus and observing fields of pomegranate trees, picturesque hills and valleys, Serkan was trying to educate us about history of early settlements, important archeological discoveries, about sites of religious activities.

Lunch exceeded our expectations. We sat outside under a huge tent and felt the gentle breeze while eating. It was buffet style with an abundance of fresh and sautéed vegetables that filled our plates – mmm --- good. After lunch, we arrived at our first destination in Izmir, a place called Art of Ceramics – Art of Life. It was a school for traditional Turkish ceramics, so called "Chini." In a small tented courtyard, sitting at the pottery wheel, the master sculptor threw fast and easy several simple shaped of bowls, lids, and vase. After this, we were invited to try. I was the first in line. It was my first time in my life at the pottery wheel touching the clay.

It was interesting to listen about symbolic meanings of various flower motifs [on the ceramics]: tulip means love, carnation means respect for family and authority, daisy means innocence.

After the ceramic place, we got on the bus and Serkan continued our history lesson as we drove to the House of Mother Mary (Meryem Ana)... In a beautiful park we went to a small brick Romanesque building, partially restored, partially preserved. Candles lit Virgin Mary's statue. It was an exciting moment to me. We washed our faces with Mother Mary's spring water, lit candles, and saw a wall of "wishes" written on paper or cloth and stuck into the stone wall blanketing the wall.

Our next destination was Ephesus (ruins of Ephesus to be exact)... Serkan is a wonderful guide. It feels like he knows every stone in Ephesus. His guidance was very interesting and very helpful... There were moments I wanted to forget the actual time I was living in and imagine myself on the streets of Ephesus when it was a live city with crowds dressed in togas and sandals walking along marble facades and under Temple porticos enjoying the gladiators' battles in the theater. The most beautiful note of Ephesus is a structure that started as an emperor's grave and was turned into a library and gymnasium. What a magnificent place even in ruins!

Our last destination was an area rug weaving school. This was of special interest to me. I love area rugs of all kinds. We met with the owner. His area rug business was a family business. He trains women from various villages, provides them with looms (for free) and then, he buys their area rugs... The owner took us to his gorgeous showroom. Carpets of all sizes, styles and weaving techniques were on the walls. The owner told us about 10 levels of carpets. He started with flatwoven, kilim, gigim, embroidered, and combinations of flat weaving techniques with piles. His assistants brought, threw on the floor, and opened for us gorgeous examples, each one met with our "wow's!" More and more beautiful carpets appeared in front of our eyes. It reminded me of a show where the actors are colorful and priceless area rugs.

Monday, June 13, 2011: Izmir

Hospital visit

We drove up to the hospital and the place looked just like a hospital, inside and out. We met with the Medical Director who is also a medical doctor, an administrator, plus a few nursing supervisors and the Director of Nursing. I (with some others) questioned the statistics he gave, since one can make numbers say whatever they want/need them to say. Nonetheless, the information was interesting regarding immunizations, disease rates (mortality and morbidity) and issues the hospital faces.

We had a tour of the hospital, which looked very clean and just like a hospital. Interestingly, family is encouraged to come/visit/stay but there was a photo of a little girl in an old fashion nurse's hat (with a crescent on the front of the cap) with her finger up to her lips indicating "Shhh" meaning "Be quiet." Turkish people don't seem to be quiet people - - so I found that funny.

I liked that people kept joining us [on a tour of the hospital], including an eye surgeon, pharmacist (wife of the medical director), etc. The conversation at our lunch table was lively.

We received breath-taking gifts of painted plates and a copy of the DVD, which we saw at the start of our visit [at the hospital]. I look forward to watching it again.

After lunch, a trip to the research station associated with Ege University where a presentation was made by the deputy director describing the multiple roles of this research station, including but not limited to, variety testing and preservation of germplasm. The variety of species studied is enormous: field crops (the most important being grains, forage & legumes, not surprisingly), horticultural crops (figs, grape, olive & citrus being the most important), medicinal crops and animals (cattle, & bees!).

I was not aware that this station was a germplasm collection center – how exciting! That puts it on the level of the USDA's Regional Germplasm Collection Centers at Fort Collins, CO; Sturgeon Bay, WI; Puyallup, WA; and Beltsville, MD.

Tuesday, June 14, 2011: On the way back to Chicago

Tuesday was the last full day of our Study Türkiye program. What an adventure it has been! We've come a long way since the awe of meeting the PM and the trepidation and excitement of being in a new land with new people. I think we all consider ourselves more experienced Turkish travelers. We've become accustomed to some Turkish mannerisms—but we continue to learn. As this trip comes to a close, we've all spent some time reflecting on who we were and what we thought of Turkey 10 days ago versus who we are and what we think now.

For some of us (well, me at least), Izmir was expected to be the third-best city of our visit. Instead, some of us fell in love with it. I'm sure it had to do with our excellent dinner on Monday night with Yusuf's family. It was my favorite meal – not because it was the best tasting (though it was good), but because there is something to be said for a meal prepared just for you by a compassionate person.

We had one more lecture[in Istanbul]—and one of particular importance to my colleagues (and me, too) on women's issues in Turkey. . . . [It] was given by a faculty member of a university in Istanbul. She was accompanied by two young women who could not have appeared more different: one wore a headscarf and very conservative attire, while the other looked more modern in her hairstyle and dress. Talk about an apt contrast when talking about women's issues in Turkey!

After an hour and a half at dinner, we took a walk up the street. It was 10 p.m. on a Tuesday night, and the restaurants were full. Musicians were playing Turkish instruments and a few brave persons were dancing. It was a lively, pleasant atmosphere. We returned to the van and noticed that a nearly full moon was shining a faint light on the Sea of Marmara. We

walked over to the seashore to behold the sight. There was something in the moment that seemed to draw our Turkish adventures to a peaceful, happy close.

We are probably all at the point where words no longer can say all that needs to be said about this trip. We have been immersed in the life and culture and language of a relatively strange land for 10 days. Hilmi did an excellent job of organizing our tours and providing so well for each of us. Zinta made an awesome faculty development project into a reality.

This trip was more than a vacation; in fact, it was never a vacation. I hope, instead, that each of us comes home a better person as a result of what we received from the Turkish people. I have a lot to do upon returning home—not the least of which is showing more generosity and sincerity in the things I must do. More than teacups and plates, a changed character and good memories are the most valuable outcomes of this trip.

