

## **2006 Summer Access Grant Report**

### **The Spread of Islamic Fervor: A Case Study of Chechnya**

Kay Shelton  
A/C/SS Division  
Kishwaukee College  
21193 Malta Road  
Malta, IL 60150  
kshelton@kishwaukeecollege.edu  
or  
kayshelton@hotmail.com

For my project, I will be building an online teaching unit on the spread of Islamic fervor in Chechnya for students at a two-year college in world regional geography and cultural anthropology classes. The topics of the Middle East and terrorism are often too charged with emotions and because of the snippets of information in the media so sometimes it becomes difficult to teach American students because they already drew their own conclusions. A place like Chechnya has similarities to other hot spot areas in the world but most students know nothing about it, so their minds may be more open and less emotional. I am currently building the online teaching unit for a mid September release based on the additional knowledge I gained from the generous Scholar Access Grant, through the Global Studies program. Students in previous geography classes seemed to indicate that they had never heard of Chechnya, but I based that on anecdotal information I surmised informally. I decided to add a simple survey to measure pre-existing knowledge students have about Islam, Chechnya, and Russia at the beginning of the unit. The exam the students will complete later in the semester will help measure their learning afterward.

With my home institution of Kishwaukee College's programs emphasizing nursing, horticulture, automotive technology, and computer information systems, the library's collection for the social sciences is brutally limited. There is one e-book on Chechnya and the bulk of the collection on Islam is on American Muslims, as in Malcolm X. Academic and professional journals for international studies are limited to one title, *Foreign Affairs*. Fortunately, I have access to the library collection at Northern Illinois University but my students do not have the same type of access; any information or materials beyond their textbooks I must compile and develop myself. Additionally, with the advent of electronic databases, one can find journal articles quickly but access is still limited to what a library purchases and one must be affiliated with that library or travel in person to use those resources. With those factors in mind, I spent my time in the libraries at the University of Wisconsin (Memorial Library, College Library, and the Social Science Reference Library), working with the reference librarians during the daytime and student assistants in the evenings, accessing materials I did not have access to in Illinois. I spent August 9<sup>th</sup> through the 15<sup>th</sup>, 2006 conducting research, with a break in the middle due to a lack of available hotel space.

I met with Librarian Thomas Durkin of the Social Science Reference Library, who provided extensive help with the university's electronic journal databases. He helped me with the databases I was not familiar with so that I could keep my research focused and not become overwhelmed by the access to a significant number of resources. With his assistance, I was able to find resources on Chechnya quickly as well as expand the scope to include comparisons to other ethnic and religious conflicts in areas such as Bosnia, Kashmir, West Asia, Afghanistan, and surprisingly Cambodia that should

enhance several units in my World Regional Geography course. The unit I will finish developing falls early in the semester and I hope that students will be able to apply that knowledge to compare and contrast related events in Chechnya to other places in the world later. I teach that course during the fall, spring, and summer semesters, with approximately 100 students each year. I will teach the cultural anthropology course in the spring semester and I will modify the unit so that it is stronger in the cultural aspects and scale back the political comparisons to other countries.

Next, besides having an extensive collection, the libraries at the University of Wisconsin hold resources from a greater variety of sources, beyond American and British authors and publishers. For example, one resource I found helpful was *Genesis of Regional Conflicts: Kashmir, Afghanistan, West Asia, Cambodia, Chechnya* edited by V. D. Chopra and M. Rasgotra and published in New Delhi. The writers in that volume have a different perspective, it is important for freshmen- and sophomore-level college students to learn that there are more than two sides to an issue. Other materials I consulted had authors from various countries in the Middle East and a few from Central Asia with perspectives most students will have very little to no previous exposure.

Lastly, as with most research, I found one unexpected resource with an additional application. When I looked at resources documenting the human rights abuses which took place in Chechnya so I can help students understand the reality of warfare, I looked at the article, "Burying the Evidence: The Botched Investigation into a Mass Grave in Chechnya" in the May 2001 issue, vol. 13, no. 3 of *Human Rights Watch*. I also teach an introductory archaeology class and I will be able to incorporate information on the politics and controversy surrounding exhuming burials following contemporary warfare

into that course. Most introductory archaeology books stereotypically focus on the splendors of Ancient Egypt but ignore important contemporary issues.