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Afghani challenges: poverty, education

By NICOLE JOHNSON
Staff writer

The Smith Center's Jackson Theatre held its first World Forum of the semester on "Education in Afghanistan: Current Challenges and Future Opportunities." Speaker Mohammad H. Qayoumi, who is currently the president of California State University, East Bay, was the featured speaker.

Qayoumi began by explaining that Afghanistan is in a "unique location. The location is a blessing as well as a curse." The country is a crossroad of many different cultures with a thriving civilization and various traditions. However, many different armies have invaded Afghanistan: Alexander the Great, the Turkish, the Arabs, the Portuguese, the Russians, and the British. Geographically, the land is very dry and about three-fourths of it is covered with mountains. Afghanistan is about the size of Texas or France. Also, Afghanistan is "under the mercy of nature," according to Qayoumi, "and suffers from serious droughts and drastic climates ranging from that of Minnesota to Arizona in a small area of the country."

Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world. Afghanistan's United Nation economic ranking is 173 out of 178 nations, the infant mortality rate is 163 per 1,000 babies, the average life expectancy is extremely low, only 43 years. Only 23 percent of citizens have access to safe drinking water, and just 6 percent have access to electricity.

Qayoumi said the unique challenges Afghanistan faces are 25 years of war and destruction, with a war damage estimate of \$240 billion, a total economic collapse and disintegration of social fabric, high per capita donor assistance, and dynamics of a post conflict environment.

Among Afghanistan's many challenges is the literacy rate of its civilians. Only 20-25 percent people maximum are literate. There is a lower literacy rate among women than men, and the majority of literate civilians live in major cities and metropolitan areas, not in the countryside.

Afghanistan also has the youngest population in the world. Another challenge is the number of refugees. There were approximately 1,500,000 Afghan refugees as of December, 2000. Afghanistan is also the "land mine capital of the world," said Qayoumi. "There is hardly a week where someone doesn't get killed by layers of landmines. The challenge is finding the older ones. Farmers have died from plowing land."

A success story of Afghanistan is telecommunication. In February 2002 only a few cell phones were given to government officials. In June 2002, "a good number of people had cell phones. Within a year, there was internet on cell phones



Photo by Tomás Ortega

Mohammad H. Qayoumi, President of Cal State East Bay, speaks on Afghanistan at the first World Forum of the semester Tuesday.

and internet cafes."

Another Afghanistan success is its media. "Afghanistan has the freest media with more than a dozen TV stations, newspapers, talk shows, and radios. It gives me a glimmer of hope."

As for education, in 2003, there were 7,000 schools with 3 million boys and 1.2 million girls. By 2005, there were 8,600 schools with 4.4 million boys and 1.8 million girls. By 2007 there were 7 million youth attending school, but still, 5 million did not have access to school. About one third of schools are in a building, one third are in a mosque or rental, and another third are in tents or in open air.

The recent development on schools is that "teachers have become a terrorist target. Over 100 attacks have been made on schools, dozens of schools were burned, teachers were killed

and injured, and over 300 schools closed since 2006."

Of the 8 schools built last year, 7 collapsed from heavy snowfall, their designs being meant for California, not the hard Afghani winter. The cost to rebuild schools is \$563 million, with only \$126 million available. "Education is being short-changed," Qayoumi said, "many women don't go to school, because there are not enough women teachers."

Seven million youth are out of school, most of them are girls. The country has 53,000 school teachers now and is adding a neccicary 64,000 in the next five years. Half of the teachers needed are female. Qayoumi's general recommendation is to enhance security, extend the government across the country, curb the corruption, and build the nation's infrastructure.

Qayoumi concluded that "it is important to be optimistic."

Learning through play

By KYLE STEPHENS
News editor

Various groups and educators from the Bay Area and beyond gathered at the center Saturday morning Oct. 4 to attend workshops and interface with fellow early childhood care providers at the Ohlone College Early Childhood Studies Department Annual Early Childhood Conference at the Kidango Child Development Center.

Ohlone College President Dr. Gari Browning made an appearance at the conference.

Janice Fonteno, Professional Development Coordinator for Early Childhood Studies, said this was notable for her position as president of the college, and at that she is Ohlone's first female president.

The attendees at the conference and overall those in the early child development field are women, so having a female dignitary was an additional honor, said Fonteno.

Some of the goals of the conference are to promote and establish Ohlone's reputation for having an excellent program in the field. The Early Childhood Studies Program at Ohlone is one of the premiere curriculums on the topic in Northern California. It is available as an Associate of Arts (A.A.) Degree or as a Certificate of Achievement, and courses in the program are widely attriculatable to other institutions. The qualifications "meet or exceed the requirements for teachers in centers and programs licensed in the State of California, by the Department of Social Services," according

to the Ohlone Early Childhood Development website. The permit also fulfils requirements for the Child Development Permit, as issued by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

Keynote speaker Natalie Berkowitz, who has created classroom science teaching aids with the Resource Area For Teachers (RAFT) as Science Outreach Program/Teacher Educator, and presented on such for a workshop at the conference. Berkowitz spoke of some misnomers about teaching science to young children, that often times educators would rather not teach the topic at all than get it wrong. Early childhood is a very critical, and brief time in the scheme of children's learning and

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Good news for board

By ANKITA CHHABRA
Staff writer

Ohlone's Board meeting on Wednesday opened with accomplishments and awards that Ohlone has received since the fall semester began, including an award for the Newark Campus.

ASOC President Jackie McCulley told the Board about progress in student senator elections and work on the student constitution. Admissions are up 9 percent since 2007. About 450 students will receive financial aid thanks to the new budget.

Trustees passed the Accreditation Report and 2008 Accountability Report. A study on the rate of transfers found CSU East Bay and UC Berkeley to be the highest.

The meeting ended on a tour of the Student Services Building, which is about 50 percent completed. The building will include an ASOC area, board meeting room, more offices and computer lab space.

The Board also adopted a revised Board Guide that some trustees, such as Vice Chair Bill McMillin, thought could use more revision and looking over.