‘U’ prof. teaches class in tandem with Moscow State University

Trial section of course explores co-instruction with global partners

BY LYDIA MURRAY
Daily Staff Reporter

Ten University Honors students are working alongside peers in Moscow in a trial section of the humanities course, “The Land of Israel/Palestine Through the Ages.”

The partnership, four years in the making, may be the first of its kind, according to Rabbinic Literature Prof. Yaron Eliav, who is leading the course alongside faculty at Moscow State University. The class has been taught for 15 years at the University.

Eliav said the trial section of the course represents both an important global experience for students and a new way to think about classroom dynamics.

“There’s a shift from a teacher-centered class to a student-centered class,” he said. “All the way back to the Middle Ages, teaching was a professor providing information to his or her students. We’re kind of changing that.”

The students involved in this partnership have a video conference with their Russian peers once a week for discussion led by either Eliav or the instructor in Moscow. The two courses are exactly the same, except for the language in which they are taught.

Students are also paired with a Russian peer to work on assignments and research projects, so they have regular contact with them outside of the general meetings.

“We discuss, unfortunately only in English, the topics of the course,” Eliav said. “This week we had a huge debate on the issue of ethnicity. Every week there is a discussion.”

LSA freshman Talia Katz, who is enrolled in the class, said she appreciates the different perspective her Russian peers provided.

“The language barrier is a little bit difficult to get across because some of them have limitations in regards to that,” she said. “It is really interesting to discuss their point of view on modern issues based on some of the ancient historical facts that we have been studying.”

The course was funded through a nearly $1 million grant from the University’s Third Century Initiative, which seeks to allocate funding to a series of academic pursuits, including broadening the University’s global reach.

Looking to the future, Eliav said he sees these kinds of global partnerships as an important development in how the world of academia approaches teaching.

“We envision that learning in the 21st century will not be confined anymore to the Ann Arbor campus, as the world has become too small for that,” he said.

According to Eliav, six other universities from across the globe have expressed interest in joining in a similar partnership, teaching a class alongside a University one.

“The word is getting out,” he said. “People are hearing about this and they want to come.”

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