



A Mission of Knowledge

By Samantha Pittman '08

For professor Jerry Galm, some of the best lessons to be learned can't be found in the classroom. That's why he packed up his bags and left the comforts of his family and home in Cheney, Wash., for the better part of a year.

The Eastern Washington University anthropology professor headed east – way east – to Kazakhstan in the former Soviet Union. A place where he acknowledges, “if they don't like the way you look, they can arrest you.”

“It wasn't easy to do this,” says Galm of his time in Kazakhstan. But for Galm, easy is not what being a Fulbright Scholar is about. It's about sacrifice – about attempting to make the world a better place, one person at a time.

Named a 2008 Fulbright Fellow, Galm spent nine months, from December 2007 to September 2008, in Kazakhstan before



returning to EWU with a “better understanding of this portion of the Islamic World.”

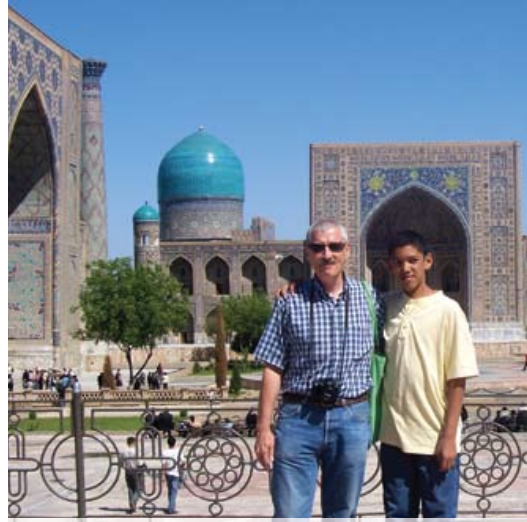
The Fulbright Grant program, which is considered one of the most prestigious international cultural exchange programs worldwide, was established in the aftermath of WWII in an effort to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and other countries through the exchange of people, knowledge and skills. Founded by U.S. Senator J. William Fulbright, it operates in 144 countries and is growing. Galm was among the first Fulbright Scholars to go to Kazakhstan.

While there, Galm immersed himself in the culture, living out of a small apartment and teaching classes at South Kazakhstan State University in Shymkent. His 11-year-old son, Cruz, accompanied him for most of the trip and attended public schools there – adding a new element to the cultural exchange.

Galm learned a little Russian, which is the language of choice in business and technology and reconnected with three other Fulbright Scholars who spent time at Eastern in 2005-2006, for help with other language barriers.

Galm taught one course on an introduction to archaeology and team-taught another on the human entry into the new world, a discussion of the North and South American “Paleolithic” period. He also taught two classes at a local public school – the first foreigner to do so in the Shymkent school system.

When he wasn’t teaching, Galm was conducting research. His primary area of



Pictured clockwise: Colleagues in Andijon, Uzbekistan, host a traditional Uzbek luncheon; Galm stands in the Caspian Sea in Aktau, Kazakhstan; Galm and son Cruz in front of the famous Registan in Samarkand, Uzbekistan; Galm with students and colleagues Michelle Glantz (far left) and her husband, Sayat Timerbekov, during their archaeological excavations at Sasyk Cave located in south-central Kazakhstan; public school students Galm instructed at Shymkent School No. 8; sellers at the Kuntepa Bazaar in Margilon, Uzbekistan; fishing trawlers and boats left to the elements as the Aral Sea disappeared in what is known as the “ship graveyard”; Kalon Minaret and Mosque, Bukhara, Uzbekistan.

interest was the Aral Sea, which has gained attention as one of the greatest man-made natural disasters in the world. Says Galm, “It was far worse than I expected.”

The Aral Sea was once the world’s fourth-largest inland sea, but has been shrinking since the 1960s, after the rivers Amu Darya and Syr Darya – which provided water to the sea – were diverted by Soviet Union irrigation projects to support Uzbekistan’s cotton industry. The sea has now shrunk to 10 percent of its original size.

The environmental disaster has led to destruction of a once prosperous fishing industry resulting in unemployment and economic suffering. Dangerous dust storms have blown salt from the dried seabed, damaging crops, polluting drinking water and causing poor air quality. Toxic chemicals from biological weapons research, which were dumped into the lake during the Soviet Era, cause serious health concerns as well. The disappearance of the sea has reportedly also caused local climate change, with hotter, drier summers and colder, longer winters.

The Kazakhstan government is working to offset the poor ecological planning of the Soviet Era by constructing a dam on the Syr Darya River, which provides water to the northern portion on the Aral Sea.

“Various organizations are working to restore the fishing economy,” says Galm. “And their efforts are helping to stop dangerous dust storms. However, the vast majority of the Sea remains dry.”

Through his research at the Aral Sea, Galm was able to plan future collaborations and is currently working to recommend a colleague from Uzbekistan for a Fulbright Grant, which he hopes will bring her to EWU in fall 2009. He also plans to publish an analysis of some of his findings with Dr. Michelle Glantz, a Fulbright Scholar from Colorado State University who was also posted in Kazakhstan.



In addition, Galm says his trip helped build a stronger foundation for the proposed establishment of a Center for Eurasian and Middle Eastern Studies at Eastern and allowed him to develop a new course on Central Asia, which Galm will team-teach with Dr. Michael Zukosky this spring quarter.

While Galm’s experience is bringing great educational benefits to students at Eastern, ultimately he hopes he left something behind in Kazakhstan as well – a better understanding of the American people. **E**

