By Aris Dravillas

Buge Karpazli and Patrecia Sianipar sit side-by-side at a table in the Old Capitol Mall, two dark-haired women blending in with other students who are studying, chatting, or eating. The two young women look like average friends meeting for lunch, but they are actually preparing to do something that has never been done on the University of Iowa campus: teach intensive Turkish and Indonesian language classes.

UI students had the opportunity to take courses on these less commonly taught languages for the first time during the Spring 2007 semester. Karpazli and Sianipar came to the UI through the Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA) program, sponsored by International Programs.

Patrecia Sianipar, of Indonesia, on the close bond she shares with fellow teaching assistant Buge Karpazli, of Cyprus, due to shared experiences in a new country and their teaching endeavors at the UI.

“We are usually together.”

Unlike commonly offered languages such as Spanish or French, Sianipar realizes that Indonesian is especially foreign. “The students who are motivated to learn my language are really, really interested in Indonesia,” the 29-year-old said. “It’s different than learning something like Spanish, because it is not an obligation or a requirement. It takes a real goal and willingness to learn.”

Hoping to effectively impart her language and culture to students in her Intensive Indonesian class, Sianipar uses an interactive Web site with both traditional and contemporary examples of Indonesian music to help her students understand and recognize the language. “I created exercises to develop their reading and listening skills through Indonesian music, both popular and traditional,” she explained. “It will help their vocabulary.”

Sianipar, who hails from the Indonesian capital, Jakarta, was shocked at the noise while introducing the UI community to new languages each year. “I felt very different from Jakarta, which is very crowded, and here it is very silent,” she said. “So the first time, I felt like I was in a village with not many people. But when time went by, I started to like it.”

Sianipar taught English to high school students in Indonesia after completing her undergraduate and master’s degrees. She then taught Indonesian in South Korea for two years. When Sianipar learned she was coming to the UI, she consulted a friend who had already studied here. “She told me a lot about Iowa City—that it was really cold, even worse than New York,” she said.

Besides preparing for teaching class and her own graduate courses, twice a week Sianipar sits in on a linguistics class, which is her area of interest. “I do translations from English to Indonesian,” she said. “Then they analyze my language and the grammar. It is a little problematic because Indonesian is so easy.”

Sianipar said the language, which is spoken by about 200 million people worldwide, has no intonations, tenses, or stresses, making it relatively easy to learn.

James Pusack, associate professor of German and director of the FLTA Critical Languages Program, said the classes taught through the program are an important addition to the UI’s course offerings. “Business, political, and research needs for foreign language expertise evolve far more quickly than our curriculum can,” he said. “The Fulbright program gives us the ability to adapt in a timely fashion, while commitments from International Programs make it possible to train and supervise these visiting scholars. That ensures high-quality instruction while introducing the UI community to new languages each year.”

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