



students faculty/staff alumni parents

you@Ohio
Entrance Info &
Apply Online

Search

Google

Ohio.edu Sites
Name Directory

Find

academics research offices athletics the arts map & tour

OUTLOOK

Ohio University
News & Information

Thursday, September 24, 2009

Expanded horizons: David Mould

Global warming fuels professor's travels through former Soviet republic

Sep 18, 2009
By David Mould

Editor's note: Stories in this student-directed Outlook series highlight the distinctive summer experiences of students and faculty from across the academic spectrum. A portion of this story will also appear in a new all-digital edition of the alumni magazine, Ohio Today. The digital magazine will debut in October.

This past summer, David Mould, professor of media arts and associate dean of the College of Communication, traveled the former Soviet republic to work with scientists on ways to discuss climate change. Here, Mould recounts his experiences following a three-day workshop in Kazakhstan.

How do you teach a Central Asian scientist how to write a press release?

Very slowly.

That's one of the lessons I've learned over the last three days at my UNESCO-sponsored workshop on how to communicate climate change issues to non-scientific audiences. The issue is not only persuading scientists to abandon scientific jargon and express complex, interrelated processes in language ordinary people can understand -- that's a problem for scientists everywhere.

I'm up against the venerable Russian literary tradition of long sentences packed with dependent clauses, parenthetical phrases and passive constructions (which is why written Russian, even in the popular print media, is difficult for non-native speakers to read). We've discussed the principles of short declarative sentences, active verbs, strong leads and the inverted pyramid. But even scientists want to write like Pushkin or Tolstoy, whose 100-plus word sentences are painstakingly analyzed by children at school for their literary merits.

By the end of the workshop, however, most of the 10 participants had grasped basic principles and seemed anxious to put what they had learned into practice. We had some great exercises including two-minute oral presentations to a legislative panel drafting a new environmental law, and a press conference (with journalism students) on emissions and water resources that challenged the participants to answer clearly, explain issues in lay terms and not answer questions on topics where they did not have the statistics or expertise.

We had lively discussions on the often-strained relationships between journalists and scientists, and on ethical issues. And, most importantly, they gained an understanding of the need to tailor messages for different audiences -- popular media, specialized media, funding agencies, politicians, university administrators, etc.



David Mould paused for a photo during a hike in the Tien Shan mountains near Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Photo(s) courtesy of David Mould

Share this story

SHARE

Email To:

Email From:

Send

Top stories

Sep 23, 2009
New sexual assault guidelines in place

Sep 22, 2009

Over lunch at a nearby restaurant, the best stories came from a government scientist who spends every summer in the mountains, monitoring the glaciers. He has survived five avalanches (with broken bones) and been chased by bears. The region is popular with trekkers, and so he often encounters parties decked out with all the latest clothing and gear from the outdoor adventure catalogs. He says they are amazed when they are overtaken by his unfashionably dressed but physically fit scientific party, briskly striding up the slopes carrying heavy monitoring equipment.

You can see the spectacular, snow-capped Tien Shan mountains, which rise to over 27,000 feet, from almost everywhere in the city, making it easy to remember where you are in terms of cardinal directions -- the mountains are always to the south.

On the drive in from the airport early Tuesday morning, Feodor (owner of the Shangrila Travel Agency, offering package tours to Turkish Mediterranean resorts and other romantic destinations) told me that the long, cold spring had delayed the snow melt this year, so there was still snow at lower altitudes. He's well enough informed to know that this is a periodic blip in long-term weather patterns, and that the glaciers are retreating. But others look at the mountains and wonder what all the climate change fuss is about.

Even with most media reporting climate change, bad science circulates on the Internet and in the zholti (yellow) press. Along with other rumors: On the way to a meeting that afternoon, my taxi driver asked me if it was really true that Barack Obama will be the last president of the United States. Why did he ask that, I replied. Because the United States will soon collapse into a series of separate states, just like the Soviet Union did, he said. He must have been reading the same source that claims that climate change is a Western invention, the latest plot to economically enslave the developing world.

There are obviously no such opinions at the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC), the site of the workshop. They have recycled an old detski sad (kindergarten) into their offices, from which they run a wide range of environmental programs and hand out T-shirts with the slogan "We're for sustainable development. What about you?"

Tomorrow, I fly to Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, for a second workshop for scientists and some work on a UNESCO journalists' training project. In order to travel to Tajikistan as a UNESCO consultant, I had to complete two online security training modules and am carrying my official UNESCO security clearance. The Lonely Planet Web site says that the approach to Dushanbe by air is through--that's through, not over--the Pamir Mountains. Even if Tajik Air is offering any in-flight movies (that's highly doubtful), I won't be watching. If it's a clear day, it should be a spectacular trip. I guess I'll let you know next time I write.

An essay written by Mould ran in the Sept. 20 edition of the Christian Science Monitor Home Forum. It can be read at:
<http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/0922/p18s04-hfes.html>

Related Links

David Mould: <http://www.scrippscollege.ohio.edu/david-mould>

Published: Sep 18, 2009 8:49 AM

Fine Arts Notebook: Dance and music

Mentoring program enters second year

Marching 110 to perform at Rose Parade

Outlook welcomes your feedback, news items and story ideas

[Share comments about the site](#)

[Submit an announcement](#)

[Share a faculty, staff or departmental achievement](#)

[Subscribe to the Outlook listserv](#)

Tel: 740-593-1890 Fax: 740-593-1887 E-mail: news@ohio.edu

Copyright © 2009 [Ohio University](#)

All Rights Reserved