



Heritage Voices: Programs

University of Pennsylvania STARTALK Intensive Urdu Summer Program for High School Students

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About the Director

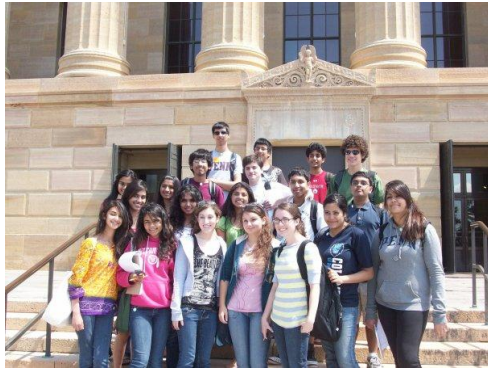


Rubab Qureshi is the director of this STARTALK program. She is a Lecturer of Urdu in the Department of South Asia Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. She has taught Urdu at the university since 2002 and created a multi-level program for Urdu instruction including advanced level courses. She is involved with promoting the creation of new community-based heritage language programs across the country and is collaborating with local colleges to introduce Urdu as a heritage language in their curriculum. Rubab is the program director of the Penn STARTALK Urdu program.

As she explains, "Urdu has always played an important part in my life. Some of my earliest memories are of my mother teaching me the English and Urdu alphabets side by side. It was the language of the home and my life as a Pakistani-American kid growing up in the US. I was fortunate to be surrounded by many Urdu speakers in my childhood who were willing to ensure that this part of our heritage was maintained and passed down. This program is in many ways my humble attempt to repay that debt."

"Our program attempts to not only provide students with the opportunity to further hone their Urdu skills in a supportive environment, we also seek to provide students a more historically, socially, and culturally nuanced understanding of the various Urdu traditions in South Asia. Students gain a deeper understanding of the cultural products and practices they observe or participate in and begin to explore this part of their identity as young adults."

About the Program



The University of Pennsylvania STARTALK Urdu student program ran for the first time in July 2009 in Philadelphia. The University of Pennsylvania annually hosts several summer programs for high school students on its campus. The South Asia Center at the university is nationally recognized as a leader in the teaching of South Asian languages. This non-residential, three-week program, which was held Monday-Friday, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm, provided an opportunity for 20 high school students from the Greater Philadelphia area to

learn Urdu through a thematic, standards-based curriculum focused on the urban centers where Urdu communities and cultures developed. No prior knowledge of Urdu was required, but a majority of the participating students had family and community connections with Urdu.



The unique traditions, cuisines, clothing, and styles of Urdu speakers in cities such as Delhi, Lucknow, Hyderabad, Lahore, and Karachi were introduced to students through activities, field trips, guest speakers, films, and activities. Students had opportunities to interact with Urdu speakers and representatives of heritage Urdu communities in the local area, prepare multi-media projects using Urdu, learn the Perso-Arabic writing

system, and gain or further develop Urdu communicative abilities. Students created short films in Urdu, hosted a traditional banquet for guests, created Wikis about the cities they learned about in the program, and staged an Urdu Mushaira Mehfil for their parents.

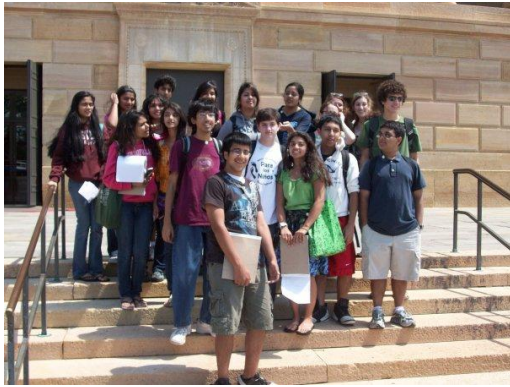
A Typical Student in the Program



Most of the participating students tend to be from the Greater Philadelphia Metropolitan Area and are 2nd generation Pakistani or Indian Americans whose parents speak Urdu and English at home. Many return to Pakistan or India on annual visits to their families, where they are exposed to more Urdu speakers. Very often students can understand the Urdu spoken around them and can respond to most queries with short answers.

Many have some or marginal literacy in Urdu. A majority of students participate in the program to be able to communicate more complex thoughts, needs, or opinions with relatives and friends. Many of them are also fascinated with the culture of Urdu speakers and want to participate in the cultural gatherings that their parents attend.

Program Impact



Once the program concluded in July 2009, students remained in contact with each other through Facebook and met monthly to maintain their Urdu skills. Teaching Assistants provide homework and project help via Facebook during the program and afterwards to reinforce what students have learned. Students are keen to return to the program in the summer 2010, and have already started to sign up. The response from members of the local Pakistani and Indian Urdu Heritage community has been phenomenal, and they are very supportive of continuing this

program in future years. Many have commented on the cultural richness of the program's curriculum and its academic rigor, which surprised many parents at first. In partnership with community leaders, the program's founders hope to create more community-based, year-long programs for students in the future that will provide standards-based Urdu instruction and materials.



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[Read about this and other Urdu programs in the Online Collection of Heritage Language Programs.](#)

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