THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
Faculty of Arts

Persian Language and Iranian Studies
at the University of British Columbia

The Leading Edge of Persian Studies

At the University of British Columbia, we see how **education underpins society**; it empowers individuals, energizes communities and creates opportunities to change the world for the better. To improve intercultural understanding and awareness among its diverse student body and the global community it serves, **UBC is taking a leadership role** in teaching and building research excellence in Persian language and Iranian studies. We understand that Persian culture, religion and literature continues to exert an extraordinary influence on the political and cultural world stage. This is evident in many disciplines, and we are committed to providing a permanent program that explores its legacy within history, literature, art, music, architecture, and philosophy, but **we need your help** to realize this vision.

Arian Zand, UBC Student.

After immigrating to Canada I was worried about losing connection with my culture. Persian poetry is an inseparable part of the Iranian culture and my Iranian identity. Being able to take ASIA 392 Classical Persian Literature in English Translation in the Department of Asian Studies at UBC was a rare and unique opportunity for me to stay in contact with my Iranian heritage and to preserve a part of my identity that I so dearly loved and have been always proud of."

– Arian Zand, UBC Student

Building on Success

The Department of Asian Studies in UBC's Faculty of Arts has offered an increasing number of Persian language courses for non-heritage and heritage learners and introduced more students to the breadth of Persian language and culture. In 2011, 53 students enrolled across just six courses. In 2018, this expanded dramatically, with 278 students participating in 12 courses ranging from basic Persian language studies to the experience of women as seen through literature, film and popular culture.

To underline its ongoing commitment, in 2019 the Faculty of Arts provided core funding for a tenure-track Instructor position in Persian Language and Culture to anchor the Persian language program. This will enrich the experiences of UBC students and prepare them to be innovative leaders, global citizens and agents for positive change at a time when North America's understanding of the complex background and rich history of Iran is crucial. **There has never been a more significant time to champion Persian language and Iranian studies.**

Over the years, this programming has been generously supported and grown by donations from many visionary stakeholders in the Iranian Canadian community and there is now increased enrolment and interest from an ethnically diverse student body. This program is now ready for permanent establishment through endowed funding, but this will require significant leadership and philanthropic support.

From Aspiration to Reality

What the Department of Asian Studies and its donors have accomplished since 2011 indicates a bright future for Persian language and literature and Iranian studies at UBC. To fully realize this potential, UBC seeks to secure permanent funding for a faculty position as well as a fund for public lectures and events. Our goal is to endow each of these areas, generating long-term support for the benefit of research, community engagement and generations of students to come:

Assistant Professor of Persian Literature and Culture Position

A fully funded assistant professor of Persian Literature and Culture will allow us to build on the program's achievements and help make the Persian Studies program permanent. The position will enable and inspire students by focusing on teaching four courses per year on Persian literature and Iranian civilization, cinema and culture, as well as collaborating with faculty in other disciplines.

Public Lectures and Events

UBC endeavours to create a permanent annual public lecture and event series to showcase our focus on Persian language and Iranian studies, and to collaborate with the wider UBC academic and Iranian Canadian communities. We want to be able to continue to assemble scholars from Asian Studies, History, and Classical, Near Eastern and Religious Studies, as well as the Asian Library, to promote study and dialogue. The fund will also support cosponsored cultural events with community groups such as the UBC Persian Club.

Persian Language Fund

Gifts from the community to the Persian Language Fund have been a remarkable resource and source of strength in helping to build this program to where it is today. The Persian Language Fund has enabled us to hire a Persian Language Lecturer, and to sponsor community-facing events. We envision using the remaining funds, and any future donations, to continue funding these areas until we have secured sufficient donor funding for the Assistant Professor of Persian Literature and Culture. At that time, any remaining funds would underwrite a continued robust calendar of Persian Studies-related public lectures and events, until that fund too is made permanent through endowment.

Student Testimonials

"It's fascinating that throughout this course I learned a lot about the history of my country and I also realized that history repeats itself. If we know the history, we know a lot about the future."

– Faranak Ghorbani

"I came to this class barely with any knowledge of Iran, its history, its surrounding regions, and the impact Iranians had on its bordering neighbours. Now, I understand, the term Iranian is not just represented by a homogeneous group of people. Instead, it is associated with a plural idea of Iranian language-speaking peoples who share traces of history, culture, and languages."

– Christina Chen

"As an International Relations major, I have always been interested in learning new languages. So far at UBC, I have taken up to four foreign languages (German, Urdu, Hindi, and Persian). I truly feel as though I've acquired the most knowledge and skills in Persian thanks to Ms. Mozhgan Zolfi.

– Faria Bhuiyan

"As a Canadian with an Iranian heritage, I learned so much about my heritage, my history and my ancestors. Thank you for offering this course.

– Robin Asgari

Thank You

Thank you for considering this leadership support of Persian language and Iranian studies at UBC. We would be pleased to work with you to develop a meaningful and appropriate donor recognition plan.

Artist Hamid Rahmanian spellbinds an audience at the 2018 UBC Department of Asian studies event "Modernizing the Persian Masterpiece, Shahnameh"

Assistant Professor Mostafa Abedinifard speaking with students and community members at a Persian Language and Iranian Studies event at UBC

"UBC defines 'Asia' broadly to include Central, South and West Asia along with East Asian countries like China, Japan and Korea. In line with a commitment to a 'Persianate' orientation in its South Asia-related programming, we have hired—in pre-existing South Asia faculty lines—two new tenure-track Assistant Professors in South Asian Islamic Persianate Civilization. These positions place Persian language training and Persian literary culture front and centre and significantly enhance the overall academic ecology at UBC for Persian Studies. In conjunction with secured funding for an additional assistant professor and the new internally-funded tenure-track Instructor position in Persian Language and Culture, UBC students will have a unique advantage in Western Canada, and UBC will cut a distinctive profile in Persianate Studies in North America."

– Ross King, Head, Asian Studies

Above photo: Martin Dee / UBC Communications & Marketing.

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