

**First Himalayan Policy Research Conference  
Nepal Study Center**

Thursday, October 19, 2006, Madison Concourse Hotel and Governor's Club,  
Madison, Wisconsin

Pre-conference Venue of the 35th South Asian Conference at the University of Wisconsin  
– Madison (October 19-22, 2006)

**Survey Feedback Report**

Nepal Study Center conducted its first annual Himalayan Policy Research Conference at the University of Wisconsin's pre-conference venue of the 35th South Asian Conference. Of the 42 abstracts submitted initially, 22 papers made it to the final program. These papers were organized into 7 panels: *Health, Gender, and Trafficking; Environment; Education and Democratization; Resource Conservation; Politics, Democracy and Conflict I and II; Development and Poverty Alleviation*. Judging from the survey report and feedback comments, the conference was productive and a big success (see appendices A, B, and C for details).

**HPRC Presentation**

On Wednesday evening (October 18), we set up a table for pre-registration to distribute name badges and the program brochures. In the morning of 19<sup>th</sup> October, we used two rooms to run four sessions (two in each room). After lunch, we converged in one room to conduct three additional sessions. In the afternoon sessions, the audience at times numbered about 30 to 35. We managed to attract several conference visitors during the course of the afternoon sessions, and many others complained about not knowing of the HPRC event in advance. We posted our event flyers at several places, and distributed program brochures generously. We have a strong feeling that the next year's conference will be able to attract a larger audience. The presentations were done using the power point projector, and the chairs ran the sessions on a clock. Two presenters who missed their morning sessions were accommodated in the afternoon. The audience was allowed to interact with the presenters following the comments by the discussants.

Nepal Study Center provided breakfast and lunch, and it was appreciated by many participants. Some thought that this allowed for conversation and discussion among the conference participants. A short introductory presentation about the center was done during the lunchtime. The day concluded with a dinner gathering at a Nepali restaurant Chautara. Among the participants, there were several non-Nepali scholars from universities like Florida State, U. of Connecticut, John Hopkins, U. of Hyderabad, and the U. of California-Berkeley. We also videotaped a few presentations.

**Survey Results**

We conducted a survey among the presenters to gather some valuable feedback. The survey questionnaires were distributed towards the end of the day. We managed to collect 15 questionnaires. A copy of the survey questionnaire is included at the end of this report.

On a scale of 1 to 10, almost all gave a 10 indicating a strong support for holding a regular conference every year. On the satisfaction level, the participants gave it a mean score of 9 out of a possible 10. These two numbers are highly encouraging for a young organization like NSC. Similarly, many expressed a strong desire to come back next year to this conference (an average of 7 out of a possible 10). We believe that the networking and the advertisement effort at the venue are likely to attract new pool of participants for next year.

### **Exploring Complementarities**

Our conference was held on October 19<sup>th</sup> (Thursday), which is known as pre-conference. A few of us (Dr. Adhikari, Dr. Sharma and Dr. Bohara) stayed one extra day on Friday to attend the South Asian sessions to learn about the venue and to network. On Saturday, the *Association of Nepal and Himalayan Studies*, one of the oldest Himalayan-related associations in North America, invited us for a brief conversation to learn about each other and to explore possibilities of identifying relative strength and complementarities. We thought that our own policy related research and academic work in the area of *development, democracy, conflict and the environment* could complement their ongoing strength on humanity related fields such as religion, language, history, and culture with some obvious overlaps in the area of social sciences. We also had lunch with a UC Berkeley professor from the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies Group in Buddhist Studies.

### **The University of Wisconsin's South Asian Conference Venue**

The three-day annual 35<sup>th</sup> South Asian Conference seems to have attracted about 300 to 350 scholars from all over, and their session started on Friday (October 20<sup>th</sup> - October 22<sup>nd</sup>). A casual observation on Saturday showed that a typical session had about 10 to 12 members in the audience, and some handful sessions with exciting themes had about 20 to 25 attendants. There were 10 to 15 parallel panels that morning. The sessions covered a wide variety of fascinating subjects such as: Vedic culture, temple architect, rituals, films, homosexuality, minority, dalit and gender rights, urban living, poetry, Islam, Iraq war, and literature. Understandably, the major theme was dominated by Indian sub-continent and its cultural heritage. Again, we felt that a policy focus of our conference would only be complementary within the larger South Asian setting. It looks like a good fit for us.

### **Acknowledgement**

NSC is grateful to those who helped organize this conference (Dr. M. Upadhyaya, Dr. VR Sharma, Dr. AP Adhikari, Dr. G. Pradhan, Mr. P. Adhikari and the graduate students and the staff of the University of New Mexico). NSC also acknowledges the financial contribution provided by UNM, and some members of the Nepali diaspora (see the program brochure for the list of contributors.) But, the real credit for the success of this conference goes to those who participated in it.

## **Appendix A**

### **Mean scores**

*Q1. We are thinking of conducting an HPRC conference every year. What is your opinion about it on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being it is an excellent idea?*

**Mean Score= 9.8**

*Q2. NSC is thinking about putting together a proceedings volume of the conference. Would you be willing to contribute your paper to the proceedings for distribution through the web interface of NSC. Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Not Sure \_\_\_\_\_ Not Applicable (Of those applicable)*

**Yes = 38.4% No = 15.4% Not Sure = 46.2%**

*Q3. On a scale of 1 to 10, what is your likelihood of attending the HPRC next year (10 for certainly yes, 1 for certainly not)?*

**Mean Score = 7**

*Q 3. If we were to hold this conference at the University of New Mexico, what would be the likelihood, on the scale of 1 to 10, that you will attend the HPRC next year (10 for certainly yes, 1 for certainly not)?*

**Mean Score = 6.8**

*Q4. Rate the overall satisfaction with the 2006 conference on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being excellent.*

**Mean Score = 8.97**

*Q5. What is your opinion about holding this conference at another venue such as Association for Asian Studies or Allied Social Science Associations? Good Idea \_\_\_\_\_ Not a Good Idea \_\_\_\_\_ I am indifferent*

**Good idea = 40% Not a Good Idea = 7% Indifference = 53%**

## **Appendix B**

### **Comments**

“Thanks to you and your colleagues for a very successful conference. I really liked the venue, because the Nepal pre-conference connected to the Nepal portions of the larger conference. Having meals provided was a real bonus, too -- it allowed for conversation and discussion among the conference participants.”

“Congratulations on a successful conference. I personally thought it was organized and executed in a professional manner by everyone responsible. I would be interested in continuing some association with the center, which of course would mean participation in future events as well.”

“Maybe, scholars or professors from the University of Kathmandu could be invited to present their thoughts on burning issues in Nepal in such an important conference.”

“Enforce paper submission and clarity on discussants/discussion.”

“a) Availability of full papers (with a little more cost in registration); b) a folder or a bag at the time of registration (with additional fee in registration); c) registration on the website (pre and late registration fees).”

“Congratulations to the organizers for doing an excellent job. This is a good first step towards expanding interaction between Nepal development scholars.”

“1) Excellent facilities and very good papers and presentations. Ample time for Q/A session; 2) Concurrent session makes it difficult to attend all the presentations; must be unavoidable! 3) Linking up with U of Wisconsin was a very good idea”

“Limit to 4 panels a day; by panel 5 people are too tired; Great work”

“Good conference but there were obvious problems; A number of people could not make it.”

“Conducting a conference every year is an excellent idea, as far as the scope of topics could be expanded to ensure broad participation, e.g. science policy. My likelihood of participating in the next year will change from current level based on my several pending plans.”

“I think we should have stuck to one session at a time rather than conducting simultaneously, given the uncertainty of presence of presenters/moderators as well as attendees. Overall it was a good event. Congratulations!”

“Good job organizing it here this year.”

“Do this conference in UNM to raise the profile of NSC.”

**Appendix C**  
**Survey Questionnaire**



**First Himalayan Policy Research Conference (HPRC)**  
**Nepal Study center<sup>1</sup>**

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**Questionnaire**

Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_ Affiliation (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Presenter \_\_\_\_\_ Discussant \_\_\_\_\_ Chair of session \_\_\_\_\_ Audience \_\_\_\_\_

Current Status: Faculty \_\_\_\_\_ Student \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

1. We are thinking of conducting an HPRC conference every year. What is your opinion about it on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being it is an excellent idea? \_\_\_\_\_
2. NSC is thinking about putting together a proceedings volume of the conference. Would you be willing to contribute your paper to the proceedings for distribution through the web interface of NSC. Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Not Sure \_\_\_\_\_ Not Applicable \_\_\_\_\_
3. On a scale of 1 to 10, what is your likelihood of attending the HPRC next year (10 for certainly yes, 1 for certainly not)? \_\_\_\_\_
4. If we were to hold this conference at the University of New Mexico, what would be the likelihood, on the scale of 1 to 10, that you will attend the HPRC next year (10 for certainly yes, 1 for certainly not)? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Rate the overall satisfaction with the 2006 conference on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being excellent. \_\_\_\_\_
6. What is your opinion about holding this conference at another venue such as *Association for Asian Studies* or *Allied Social Science Associations*?  
Good Idea \_\_\_\_\_ Not a Good Idea \_\_\_\_\_ I am indifferent \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments or Feedback (on how such a conference could be made better):

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