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Communication Faculty Research Youth Activists and Media

Their study compares how Turkish and American students' use of media addresses their political views.

Ayşe Fulya Sen, associate professor of journalism at Firat University, Elazığ, Turkey, has spent three months at the University of Minnesota, Morris to work on a collaborative research project with Barbara Burke, associate professor of communication, media, and rhetoric. Their project revolves around students and provides them with a chance to get involved in research as both subjects and participants.

Sen met Burke more than three years ago at an international conference in Saint Cloud where they were presenting their individual projects regarding media literacy and the way news media covered activists. They decided to combine their interests in a single collaborative research project comparing Turkish and American students' use of new media to address their views on political topics.

“Young folks are first to adopt new media as a communication tool,” says Burke. “If they like it, they use it a lot.”

Sen wants to gain more insight on the reactions of Turkish youth tendencies related to social media activism and how they are affecting countries outside Turkey. She believes these movements affect the whole world and hopes to inspire other scholars on these matters as well.

“I recognize that social media is very important to conduct public affairs and create new social movements,” says Sen.

This study gives students an opportunity to get involved in research studies and to develop interviewing skills, data reporting, use of management systems, and transcription skills. It also provides an international component as it helps spread word of Morris beyond the campus community.

Burke and Sen are taking an unconventional approach to research in that they are addressing the opinions of young people instead of focusing on movement leaders. By interviewing young people who are observing and participating in these movements, they explore a different relationship with society.

“It is important to create new movement patterns in the world,” says Sen. “It is enough for young people to pull out their cell phones and tablets, and send small sentences to to able to do this.”

This activity is supported by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK), the leading agency for management, funding, and conduct of research in Turkey. To learn more, visit tubitak.gov.tr/en/.