

The Bengali Language Program at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

The Bengali language program at the University of Michigan is part of the university's larger Center for South Asian Studies. In 2004 the first few students of Bengali language entered the classroom. After three years, the program continues to mature and produce young people in the study of this critical language. Students of Bangladeshi and Indian descent continually enroll in the program. There are also several non-South Asian students who have embraced the desire to learn Bengali language and educate themselves about Bengali culture, history and religion. Under the leadership and instruction of Mandira Bhaduri, professor of Bengali, students have proven extremely successful in their speaking, listening, reading and writing abilities. In addition to formal learning and in class assignments, students with Professor Bhaduri have taken Bengali language beyond the classroom.

Due to an increased interest in learning about Bengali language and culture beyond the classroom, students with Bhaduri mobilized themselves last semester and formed what has become the "Bikele Nasta Club." Originally intended as a forum for students to gather once a week and conduct informal 'adda' in Bengali on various topics of interest, it has instead transformed into something much more. Students, professors, visiting scholars and community members meet on a regular basis and, in addition to social interaction, create other opportunities to participate in Bengali programs and activities. For example, students plan, coordinate and facilitate cultural potlucks once a semester, organize field trips to local Bengali communities such as Hamtramck, Troy and Novi, participate in various other community programs such as Mitali's Saraswati Puja, a celebration to commemorate Ekushey February, and SAAN's (South Asian Awareness Network) annual conference. Moreover, with the North American Bengali Conference taking place in Detroit, Michigan this year, many students have indicated great interest in participating in this important event. The Nasta Club has become more visible and as a result has gained momentum in spreading awareness about Bengali language and culture. Currently, students are working on a club scrapbook, a monthly newsletter, and a magazine, entitled "Banglazine," that will be produced and published once a semester. Furthermore, their website under construction is <http://umbangla.bravehost.com/>

For more information on the Bengali Language program at UM, please contact Rohit Setty at: settyrb@umich.edu

To stay informed about the Bikele Nasta Club and their activities and to be added to their mailing list, please contact Mandira Bhaduri: mbhaduri@umich.edu or Haley Gallagher: haleyg@umich.edu

To make a donation and contribute to the sustainability of the Bengali language program at UM, please contact Rohit or direct a gift to the following account:

Bengali Language Fund (307909)

Purpose: To make UM the premier center in North America for Bengali language studies. Goal: \$1,000,000

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