



Center for International Education (CIE) Newsletter

Center for International Education Speakers Series 2026

Speaker 1: A Talk From The Heart with Ash Hartwell

The Center for International Education (CIE) gathered for a special talk in our 2026 Speakers Series: **The Heart and Mind of CIE – Personal Reflections, featuring Ash Hartwell.**

In this reflective conversation, Ash Hartwell shared personal insights from years of work in international and comparative education, exploring the ideas, commitments, and relationships that shape the spirit of CIE. Through stories and reflections, the talk invited participants to consider how values, community, and global engagement continued to guide CIE's work in education and social change. Participants also had the opportunity to engage in conversation about the past, present, and future of the CIE community. The event took place March 9 at the Montague house.



After the participants shared their insights from a critical thinking exercise, Ash presented three examples of projects that helped shape CIE a) the Ecuador Nonformal Education project, b) the Learning for Life Project which sought to empower rural women in Afghanistan with basic literacy and health skills to enable them to enter mid-wife training, and c) the Education in Crisis and Conflict Network project that analyzed theories of change and ran workshops for youth in Nigeria and Uganda using accelerated learning methods.

Ash concluded with the comment that "A critical challenge for CIE – transforming education systems is really complex – there are no substitutes to living and learning within the organic change process."

One participant commented afterwards: "First, it brought together students from the IE program, along with UMass alumni and undergraduate students who are interested in the program. Second, the lecture itself centered on the theme of learning. ... I gained a deeper appreciation that everyone is at a different stage in life. As a result, people see, feel, and experience things in different ways."

-From the CIE Facebook page post (credit to David Evans and Connie Wei)





Speaker 2: Aizzah Fatimah, Writer, Producer and Actress in “Americanish”



The Center for International Education (CIE) hosted a special gathering in our 2026 Speakers Series: Screening of the movie *American-ish* and a talk with Aizzah Fatima, a writer, producer and actress in the film. The event took place on March 27, in the Carney Auditorium, Furcolo with a discussion following at the Center for International Education at Montague House

American-ish is a comedy mixed with cultural exposition that highlights different layers of womanhood as they intersect with cultural and societal expectations. *American-ish* delves into the complexity of trying to both honor and break from cultural traditions while balancing personal values and career goals in a society that does not always accommodate both. It can be viewed on Google Play, Prime Video and Apple TV.

Questions About the Film’s Themes Reflected by Aizzah Fatima

1. What inspired you to create or participate in a film like American-ish?

I was drawn to the project because it tells stories that are often underrepresented in mainstream media. The film explores identity, family expectations, and womanhood in a way that feels both specific and universal.

2. How does American-ish challenge stereotypes?

One goal of the film was to show women as multidimensional people rather than simplified stereotypes. The characters are ambitious, flawed, funny, independent, and deeply human. Representation matters because audiences deserve to see nuanced portrayals and real lives of people.

3. What do you think is the biggest challenge for young women navigating both cultural traditions and modern American society?

Often it’s the pressure to satisfy competing expectations. Many young women feel they must honor family traditions while also pursuing their own goals and identities. The challenge is learning that identity can be both.

4. Did your own experiences influence the writing or performance in the film?

Many moments in the film are inspired by lived experiences or conversations within immigrant communities. Authenticity comes from drawing on real emotions and real cultural dynamics.

5. What challenges did you face bringing this story to the screen?

Independent filmmaking is always challenging, especially for stories centered on underrepresented communities, especially with limited funding and visibility.

6. What do you hope audiences take away after watching American-ish?

I hope audiences leave with greater empathy and understanding — but also with joy. The film is about complexity, but it’s also about connection, resilience, family, and finding your own voice.

-Yasmin Hassan



Aysegul Ildeniz Closes the 2026 CIE Speaker Series

Global Engagement: AI and the Future of International Education



Global technology expert Aysegul Ildeniz wrapped up the 2026 CIE Speaker Series on April 27, lending invaluable insight into the rapidly expanding universe of AI—its real-world implications and the opportunities it may present for advancing international education programs and curriculum.

Originally from Turkey, Ildeniz—recognized by Fast Company as one of the most creative people in the world—possesses rare expertise and a practical grasp of AI and technology innovation. During her career at Intel, she served as Regional Director for Turkey, the Middle East, and Africa and helped reach 1.7 million teachers through a single project developed in partnership with multiple Ministries of Education. She later served as Vice President of Intel, leading the New Devices Group in California. Ildeniz is also a published writer and columnist and a past Eisenhower Fellow.

Ildeniz addressed the international audience—both in person and via Zoom for our online students and alumni. Diving right in, she demystified AI as “the statistical average of all data that has context and relationships between words. It is only the average of what it is fed, and it is unable to move into the external world.” The hour-and-a-half session flew by, and ideas flowed through important questions and profound responses.

How can we allay fears about the breakneck pace of this innovation—doubling in capability every four months? Ildeniz emphasized the importance of balance as the technology rapidly evolves. She added that critical thinkers will play an even larger role going forward: “The uniqueness of humanity enables us to think and imagine as wild and as wide as possible, and AI can function as an agent if given proper boundaries. When directed, it can organize an event such as this one: defining what percentage of tasks could be outsourced, streamlining a moderator’s guide, and defining relevant questions.”

Ildeniz addressed direct concerns in higher education: “The intention of higher ed is to educate students on how to think and learn continuously. It is the role of our brain to tackle problems by editing information. When you only use one area of the brain, burnout occurs. In the future, I believe investing in the social sciences will hold greater importance to teach students how to assess (problems).”

With drastic cuts in educational funding, concerned participants asked how AI can be directly applied within CIE. She noted that only 5% to 10% of countries have issued and implemented policy papers to guide AI governance. “Ministers of Ed are anxious to provide deliverables. We are hopeful in two areas: healthcare and education.” For example, in areas of the world “women are not allowed to attend school. Pairing online learning and AI goes a long way with these isolated populations. Also, in Saudi Arabia, women engineers were limited to educational access in the past, and technology allowed them a lifeline to thrive as engineers.”

Online learning programs, such as those in International Education at UMass Amherst, are an excellent example of how institutions can adapt and pivot as AI weaves itself into the educational fabric. The final message as takeaway from this exchange was, “Become Involved.” This was a remarkable opportunity to consider the integration of AI and other technologies while continuing the ethos of the Center.

-Laurencia Ciprus

Please stay tuned for updates as we continue this dialogue. Reach out to cie@umass.edu with your thoughts.



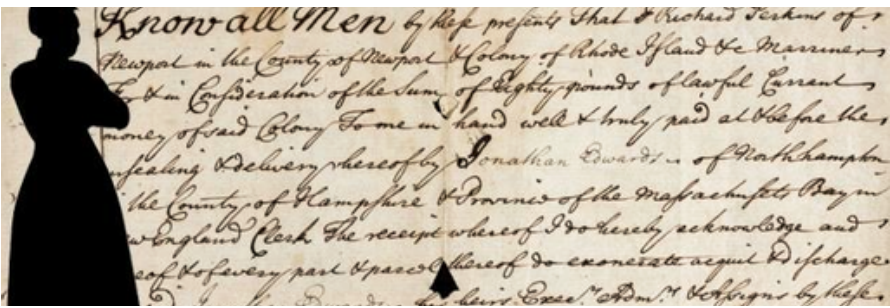
Events at the Center for International Education 2025-2026

CIE Visited the Exhibition “Slavery and Freedom in Northampton”

CIE students visited the extraordinary exhibition of the Slavery and Freedom in Northampton on November 16, 2025. We enjoyed a guided gallery walk that offered a deep look into the local history of slavery and freedom in the Northampton region. The exhibition also connects with broader themes of diaspora, power, agency, and community. The exhibition was highly relevant for students exploring history, international studies, social justice, or cultural studies and international education.



Pictured are International Education faculty and students at the Slavery and Freedom exhibit.



CIE Celebrated the 40th Anniversary of the Institute for Training and Development (ITD)

The Institute for Training and Development (ITD) has celebrated its 40th anniversary. It was the time when CIE representatives, including CIE Interim Director, Professor Bjorn Nordtveit, attended the anniversary gala to celebrate the long-time partnership between the CIE and ITD.

The Institute for Training and Development (ITD) is a nonprofit organization based in Amherst, Massachusetts, dedicated to education and intercultural exchange. ITD has supported civic engagement, academic exchange, youth leadership, sustainable development, and other priority areas worldwide by immersing community leaders, scholars, professionals, governmental and non-governmental administrators in engaging programs from over 100 countries.



<https://itdamherst.org/>



The Center for International Education (CIE) 2025-2026 Team



Cong (Connie) Wei is a first-year Ph.D. student in the International Education program at UMass Amherst and a Fellow at the Center for International Education (CIE). In her role at CIE, she works on marketing, communications, and research coordination, contributing to initiatives that strengthen connection and collaboration within the CIE community. Before joining UMass Amherst, Connie served as a faculty member in economics, where she conducted applied policy research focused on environmental policy, governance, and development. Her academic and professional interests center on how education policy can advance social equity and inclusive development globally.



Yasmin Hassan is a doctoral student in the International Education Program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She works with the Center for International Education (CIE). In her role, Yasmin is dedicated to fostering collaboration and ensuring that the spirit of CIE thrives across the community. Before joining UMass Amherst, Yasmin earned a B.A. in English Arts and Literature, an M.B.A., and an M.A. in Educational Leadership with a focus on Higher Education Leadership. She has worked with a range of governmental and private institutions, and earlier in her career, she served as a Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA) in the United States. Yasmin’s research interests center on International higher education.



Bjorn Nordtveit is interim Director of the Center of International Education and the chair of the Department of Education Policy, Research and Administration (EPRA) since 2022, after serving for ten years as Associate Professor at UMass and five years as Research Assistant Professor at the University of Hong Kong. He has also served as visiting faculty at Zhejiang Normal University. Prior to joining academia, he worked for twelve years (1994-2005) with UNESCO in the Lao PRD and with the World Bank (mostly in West African countries) on non-formal youth and adult education. He has also worked with UNESCO in Iraq as an educational observer. Bjorn wears many hats in order to support the Center.



Annie Stephany serves as the Student Success Coordinator for Online Programs in the College of Education. In this staff role, she is a support for all online master’s students in International Education and Higher Education, helping them stay connected and engaged with the broader community—no matter where they are in the world. Annie oversees key aspects of the online M.Ed. programs, including class scheduling, course selection, and enrollment support. She also plays an active role in fostering community among doctoral and master’s students alike, organizing virtual coffee hours, hybrid potlucks, and other hybrid or online events. This year her office is located near the CIE main office (Room 127), although often in Furcolo W106 working with the online programs team and faculty.

