Designing Across Cultures

Three Students Reimagine Communication for Iran's Future

When graduate student Nadia Ahmadi first began teaching English in Iran more than a decade ago, she noticed something troubling. Her students could master grammar and vocabulary, yet they still struggled to understand everyday documents—from school forms to government notices—written in their own language.

"Some exam forms or government documents used overly complex phrasing that even advanced learners found difficult," she recalls. "How information is presented can either empower or block people."

That realization ultimately led her to Missouri S&T's technical communication program, where she is now studying how culture, design, and language intersect to shape public understanding.

Nadia and her Iranian classmates, Bahar Gholinejad-Pirbazari and Saba Moazeni, are among dozens of international students, past and present, who have come to Missouri S&T to study technical communication.

Clarity as Empowerment

With a BA in English Translation and an MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Nadia spent 13 years teaching students across age groups and published research on plagiarism in academic writing. Over time, she noticed patterns—not simply in how people wrote, but in how institutions failed to communicate effectively

"In Iran, public information is often authority-driven," she explains. "The tone assumes the audience will comply rather than engage."

Hospital consent forms stand out as an example. "They were long, full of legal jargon, and rarely explained in plain Persian. Families often signed without understanding."

Studying technical communication at S&T introduced her to new concepts that feel transformational. "User personas completely shifted my thinking. Now I focus less on the rules of writing and more on what the reader needs."

Her goal is to redesign bureaucratic forms that frustrate millions daily. Clearer structure, she believes, would not only save time but "improve public trust."

Nadia Ahmadi

Designing for a Digital Future

For fellow student Bahar, the most pressing communication challenges in Iran now exist online.

"Digital communication is getting bigger every day," she says. "Phones and technology are becoming more common, even for people who resisted them before."

Iran's digital ecosystem, however, has limitations. Internet access is inconsistent, and international software—including widely used design tools—is often inaccessible due to sanctions. As a result, the leap toward modern digital literacy has been rapid, uneven, and sometimes overwhelming.

"If you are not a tech-savvy person, many essential apps are very difficult," she notes. Her own father prefers to buy a Wi-Fi plan in person rather than struggle through a confusing interface. "The design often doesn't consider the non-expert user."

Still, Bahar sees tremendous potential, especially in education. Having taught previously, she wants to improve online learning access through better communication design.

Bahar Gholinejad-Pirbazari

"People back home don't yet fully know the essence of online teaching, I want to build strategies and content that make education accessible and effective for everyone."

-Bahar Gholinejad-Pirbazari

Tradition as Design Language

While Nadia and Bahar focus on usability and infrastructure, Saba emphasizes the ways culture infuses communication in Iran, especially visually.

"Poetry is huge in Iran," she says. "Communication is often based on emotion. Even a company logo must connect with heritage to be understood."

As a calligraphy instructor and literature scholar, Saba understands how deeply symbolism shapes Iranian understanding of space, color, and identity. She gestures to her scarf, which is a vibrant Persian blue.

"Color means a lot in our culture. [Moreover,] Every line in a design can speak volumes. If something uses Persian patterns or calligraphy thoughtfully, we can immediately tell it's for us."

She cautions that adopting Western minimalism without cultural context could make communication among Iranians feel foreign rather than familiar.

"Some think removing cultural elements will make designs accepted worldwide," she says. "But our cultural identity is our strength. Respecting difference means placing tradition within a modern framework."

Missouri S&T as Turning Point

Despite their different perspectives, all three students see their time at Missouri S&T as a turning point—not only professionally, but personally.

"This program has already made me consciously aware of the differences in opportunity and approach," Saba reflects. "I am building a new framework that combines the deep understanding I have of my culture with the strategic principles I am learning here."

For Nadia, the biggest shift is recognizing intent behind design. "Information hierarchy would have changed so many things I struggled with back home," she says.

And for Bahar, it is a confidence that skillful communication can reduce barriers and expand opportunity, particularly as technology evolves.

Whether improving public forms, strengthening mobile usability, or blending tradition with innovation, each of these students envisions a future in which communication is not simply functional, but also respectful, empowering, and culturally aware.

Nadia sums up their shared perspective eloquently: "Communication should help people, not confuse them."

"I am building a new framework that combines the deep understanding I have of my culture with the strategic principles I am learning here."

-Saba Moazeni