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Local author speaks to students

■ **WRITER:** Kate Wilhelm discusses her science fiction works with international students learning English

By Shana Cohn
Higher Education Editor

After reading some of Kate Wilhelm's novellas, student Jasem Al-Azmi thought the local fantasy and science-fiction writer believed in ghosts.

But after Al-Azmi and other students from the American English Institute asked the writer herself on Monday, an understanding of her characters and themes became more clear.

"Before she came, I thought she believed in ghosts and didn't know anything about hypnosis," said Al-Azmi, a 19-year-old from Kuwait.

Wilhelm spent an hour grappling with a cold and answering questions from a class of about 45 international students who are reading "A Flush Of Shadows," a collection which contains five mystery-fantasy novellas by Wilhelm.

Students asked questions about her belief in the supernatural and her thoughts on male and female roles in society.

"I believe at times we have unexpected powers, but I don't believe in ghosts," said Wilhelm.

Wilhelm said hypnosis, a re-occurring topic in her work, has been a long-time fascination she has deeply researched.

"I have been hypnotized and I'm a good subject," she said. "I was also taught how to be a hypnotist." But Wilhelm said she's become discouraged with the topic because many don't believe it works and research to prove otherwise has been slow to non-existent in developing.

One student asked Wilhelm if



Kate Wilhelm signs autographs for students in the American English Institute. She spoke with them about her book "A Flush of Shadows".

she was sexist — toward men — because her female characters are always strong and intelligent.

"My women don't wait for the man to save them, but a strong woman doesn't make a normal man weak," Wilhelm said. "Two strong people can make for a great couple."

The reading of Wilhelm's novellas is part of AEI's new approach to teaching English as a second language.

"We are using a more unique way to learn language, with massive amounts of reading and writing," said Ron Metzler, an instructor for AEI. "In all reading and writing classes, we are teaching fluency in terms of ideas, then accuracy and correctness."

Metzler said the University is one of only two in the country that's using this pilot program which began last winter.

"So far, we think it's a more sensible approach to learning English than studying grammar," Metzler said. "Studying ghosts and things flying through the air is more interesting than verbs."

Wilhelm's novellas were chosen because they are short and action packed, he said.

"Kate's novellas contain elements of mystery and natural powers," Metzler said. "They keep students' attention."

Students attending class on Monday, who are mainly from Pacific Rim countries, have an average understanding of English.

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