

# **Brandeis/Al-Quds Partnership American Studies Exchange**

Report: Brandeis University visit, March 17-31, 2006

Washington, D.C. visit, March 31 - April 8, 2006

**Exchange Leaders:** Mohammed Dajani and Daniel Terris

**Partnership Directors:** Daniel Terris and Khuloud Khayyat Dajani

**Project Staff:** Stephanie Gerber Wilson

## Executive Summary

In March 2006, four graduate students from the American Studies Institute at Al-Quds University spent two weeks on the campus of Brandeis University and one week in Washington, D.C. They came to Brandeis under the leadership of Professor Mohammed Dajani, founder and director of the American Studies Institute at Al-Quds University. The four students were Zeina Barakat, Dalia Labadi, Urieb Abd-al Samad, and Eliana Zeidan.

## **PART I: BRANDEIS VISIT**

### Activities

During their time at Brandeis, the Al-Quds students participated in the following principal activities:

1. Visiting Brandeis classes.

Classes included courses in American Studies, Conflict Resolution, Women's Studies, and other relevant disciplines. Students took part in a number of classes, including "American and the World" (Professor Stephen Whitfield); "Violence in American Life" (Professor Jacob Cohen); "American Individualism" (Professor Stephen Whitfield); "Women in American History" (Professor Joyce Antler); "Women and Gender in Culture and Society" (Professor Susan Lanser).

2. Consulting with members of the **Brandeis faculty**.

Students consulted on their Master's theses and other American Studies topics. Faculty who participated in one-on-one meetings with the Al-Quds students included: Stephen Whitfield (American Studies), Mark Auslander (Anthropology), Joyce Antler (American Studies), Richard Gaskins (American Studies), and David Gil (Heller School).

3. Making **presentations** to the Brandeis community about peace studies, the Middle East, and American Studies.

Professor Dajani presented on “Exploring the Future: Big Dreams, Small Hopes” to more than 40 members of the Brandeis community on March 22, and Dalia Labadi and Eliana Zeidan presented to a class of 30 students on March 23.

4. **Meetings** with Brandeis students, faculty, and administrators and engaging in conversations about American Studies, the Middle East, and world affairs.

A reception hosted by the American Studies department on March 20 attracted more than 50 faculty members and students, featuring remarks by department member Jacob Cohen. This event was followed up by a series of informal lunches and conversations about topics of mutual interest. The students were hosted for dinner with other faculty and students at the homes of Adam Jaffe, Dean of Arts and Sciences, and project director Daniel Terris. The students and Professor Dajani also met with Brandeis University president Jehuda Reinharz.

5. Attending and participating in significant **events** on the Brandeis campus, such as the appearance by Sister Helen Prejean, one of the leading opponents of the death penalty in the United States.
6. **Research** on their Master’s theses, making extensive use of the library resources and personnel of Brandeis University (more on research below). This work was in fulfillment of the larger partnership goal of working together to create new knowledge.
7. Visits to important **historical and cultural sites and events** in the Boston area.

The students had the opportunity to visit the Freedom Trail, the Massachusetts State House, the North End, Faneuil Hall, Harvard Square, the Lexington and Concord battlefields, the Alcott family home in Concord, and the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (the last with Professor Stephen Whitfield as driver and guide). The program also included a visit to an African-American community in West Medford, Massachusetts (courtesy of Professor Mark Auslander), where the students talked with community residents and visited their neighborhood, in the meantime learning about the American civil rights movement and techniques for recording community memory. The students also attended a play about Palestinian and Israeli women, visited Brandeis University’s Rose Art Museum, and screenings of two classic American films.

8. Spent two-day weekend in Cambridge, where they visited Harvard University and met with students.

## Research

As planned, the students spent a great deal of time focused on their research projects, using the opportunity of being at an American university to access materials and shape the intellectual dimensions of their work. Students met on several occasions with project directors Mohammed Dajani and Daniel Terris in order to hear feedback on their work,

develop ideas, and identify new materials. In each case, the students came away with new directions, new resources, and new ideas:

**Zeina Barakat** arrived with an idea of studying “American Women and Equal Rights”; her time at Brandeis helped her focus her thesis on the more specific topic of sexual harassment in the American workplace. She made use of the newly published books on the topic as well as extensive series of newspaper articles written by Brandeis associate Florence Graves that led to the exposure of sexual harassment in the office of Senator Robert Packwood in the early 1990s, and she developed a case study approach to her work.

**Dalia Labadi** is working on anti-Arab sentiment in the United States. She was able to access several recently published books and articles on the treatments of Arabs in the U.S. that were unavailable to her in Ramallah, and she consulted with Professor Stephen Whitfield on her topic. Most importantly, Dalia’s research and experience in the U.S. changed her outlook on her topic. She arrived believing that anti-Arab sentiment was a deep-seated phenomenon in American history. Over the course of her stay, her views modified, and she began to place more emphasis on the role of September 11 on stimulating anti-Arab sentiment.

**Urieb Samad** was influenced deeply by her work with American Studies professor Stephen Whitfield and anthropology professor Mark Auslander. She arrived with a strong interest in Native American Studies, and she gathered some important materials on that subject in the Brandeis library. But equally importantly, Professor Auslander introduced her to the techniques of community memory and oral history that he has used as a researcher and a teacher, and he even went so far as to provide the American Studies Institute with a hand-held digital tape recorder for Urieb’s use. Urieb now wishes to focus her Master’s thesis on a comparative study of Palestinian and Native American narratives, with a focus on issues of displacement. Urieb also reports that she was greatly influenced by discussions in class on “American individualism.”

**Eliana Zeidan** arrived at Brandeis with a broad interest in “Woman in American Politics.” After attending Professor Joyce Antler’s class on “Women in American History,” Eliana decided to focus her Master’s thesis on the figure of Eleanor Roosevelt, a pioneer in the human rights field and also, by the way, a faculty member for several years in the early 1960s at Brandeis University. Eliana consulted with Professor Antler, who pointed her toward biographical materials on Eleanor Roosevelt, as well as putting her in touch with some prominent researchers in the field, whom Eliana planned to follow up with during the Washington D.C. portion of her visit.

Zeina, Dalia and Urieb report that the Brandeis experience has left them more determined to seek ways to seek a Ph.D. in the field. All four students came away at the end of the two weeks with many new materials – some in the form of books and photocopies, others

in the form of articles downloaded onto flashdrives for them to work with later from home. Professor Susan Lanser of the English and Women's Studies departments generously agreed to make available to the students the services of a graduate student, Sari Edelstein, who has agreed to devote 4-5 hours/week after the students return home to fulfilling requests for specific research materials that the students identify as they progress with their work. The Brandeis University librarians also donated a number of duplicate volumes from the Brandeis libraries to the library of the American Studies Institute.

### **Educating Our Communities**

The visit also contributed significantly to the larger partnership goal of "Educating our Communities." In addition to the informal conversations, a large campus-wide celebration was held in the lobby of the main campus center. The celebration featured photographs of Al-Quds University by Brandeis photographer Mike Lovett (who visited Al-Quds in December 2005), remarks by Daniel Terris and Mohammed Dajani, and a performance of Palestinian music by two of the Al-Quds students and a Brandeis undergraduate, Noam Smooha. More than 120 people attended this celebration.

In addition, the visit was covered in the campus and local media. The Brandeis student newspaper, the *Justice*, ran a front-page story, and a short article on the visit was printed in the *Jerusalem Post*. Dalia Labadi and Eliana Zeidan were interviewed by the local public radio station, WBUR, and an eight-minute segment of their interview was aired on the program "Here and Now" on April 5, 2006. Of course, it is impossible to measure the knowledge and goodwill generated through dozens of conversations in the library, the classroom, and over meals and coffee.

Many of the meetings and visits were captured on videotape, and so will be available for the documentation aspect of the partnership.

### **Follow-up Possibilities**

As mentioned above, the students will continue to work on their research projects as re-defined during their time at Brandeis, with the research assistance of a Brandeis graduate student. Mohammed Dajani and Daniel Terris will confer and work together on plans to build on and continue the exchanges in American Studies. New funding sources will need to be identified.

### **Brandeis Contributors**

The visit was a strong success because of the deep and extensive involvement of so many people on the Brandeis campus. Of particular importance were the institutional support of the American Studies department and of Library and Technology Services (LTS) at Brandeis. Faculty and staff members from both areas went above and beyond the call of duty to assist and teach the Al-Quds students. Of course, they all learned a great deal from Professor Dajani and his students in the process.

Key contributors to the success of the visit from the Brandeis community include:

**American Studies faculty and staff:** Joyce Antler, Jacob Cohen, Shilpa Dave, Richard Gaskins, Angie Simeone, Stephen Whitfield.

**Other Brandeis faculty:** Mark Auslander (anthropology), Adam Jaffe (Dean of Arts and Sciences), Susan Lanser (English and Women's and Gender Studies), Neil Simister (biology).

**Library and Technology Services:** Matt Ashland, Jason Bernard, Lori Dembowitz, Robert Evensen, Perry Hanson, Janet Hill, Leslie Homzie, Kelsey Libner, Tim O'Neil, Judy Pinnolis, Chris Roppola, Laura Reiner, Darwin Scott, Evan Simpson, Leslie Stebbins, Ralph Szymczak, Anna Tomecka, Sue Wawrzaszek, Dave Wedaman, Josh Wilson.

**Other Brandeis staff members:** John Hose, Mike Lovett, Lorna Miles, Dave Nathan, Dennis Nealon, Inessa Shishmanyman, Lynn Weisel.

Special thanks to Stephanie Gerber Wilson, the partnership coordinator on the Brandeis side, who worked tirelessly at every level to make the visit a success.

## **PART II: WASHINGTON, D.C. VISIT**

During their time in Washington, D.C., the Al-Quds students participated in the following principal activities:

1. Visits to important **historical, educational, and cultural sites**, including the following:

**Universities:** University of George Washington University, University of Maryland.

**Monuments and Memorials:** Washington Monument, Jefferson Memorial, Lincoln Memorial, Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial, World War II Memorial, Arlington Cemetery, Iwo Jima Memorial, Korean War Veterans Memorial, U. S. Navy Memorial, Civil War Memorial, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Arlington National Cemetery.

**Government and Public Buildings:** U. S. Capitol, White House, U. S. Senate and House of Representatives, Supreme Court, Department of State, J. Edgar Hoover F.B.I. Building, Bureau of Engraving and Printing.

**Museums and Galleries:** Smithsonian American Art Museum, National Gallery of Art, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Gallery of Fine Arts, National Museum of the American Indian, Air and Space Museum, National Postal Museum, Holocaust Museum, Zenith Gallery.

**Parks and Gardens:** National Mall, Cherry Blossoming Trees, Potomac Park.

**Entertainment:** Pentagon City Mall, Movies (Ice Age).

**Libraries:** University of Maryland Library, Library of Congress, National Archives.

**Religious Praying Places:** Washington Mosque, Washington Cathedral.

## 2. Meetings

**U. S. Department of State:** With officials from the Branch for the study of the U. S., Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs – Robert Schmidt, Brian Gibson, Adam Van Loon, Janice Curreri, Fulbright Program Officer, Michael Bandler and Mofid Deak, Bureau of International Information Programs. Presentation and discussion of the creation and development of the American Studies Program at Al-Quds University. The meeting helped to focus on the needs of the program and the difficulties it encounters. Also, the exchange included discussion of courses offered by the program, particularly the American Experience through Film Course.

**American Task Force on Palestine (ATFP):** lunch and talk with Dr. Ziad Asali President, American Task Force on Palestine (ATFP), about Palestinian-American community. The meeting helped students understand the challenges facing the Arab minority to blend in the American experience. Also, Dr. Asali explained the importance of being present “on the table” to show the Palestinian point of view. He explained the role the Bush Administration played in controlling mass anger at Arabs and Moslems in the aftermath of the September 11 tragic events.

**University of Maryland;** With Dr. Edy Kaufmann, Conflict Resolution Center, Dr. Saul Sosnowski, Office of International Programs, Dr. Mary Corbin Sies, Department of American Studies. Exploring the possibilities for doctorate degree opportunities for the graduates of the American Studies at al-Quds University.

**Meridian International Center:** With Acting President and Hannelore Starr, Vice President for Special Projects, and Dr. Irene Jillson. Presentation and discussion of the creation and development of the American Studies Program at Al-Quds University.

**Carnegie Endowment for International Peace:** With Dr. Nathan Brown, lunch and talk and discussion on the role Think Tanks play in the public policy decision-making process.

**Middle East Institute:** With Librarian Simon Braune about research opportunities. Bought more than 30 books from its Library and mailed it to the American Studies Institute.

3. **Presentation:** Professor Mohammed Dajani delivered his presentation, “Big Dream Small Hope: A Vision of Peace” at the University of Maryland, attended by 20 university faculty and students.
4. **Tours:** Three hour tour aiming at moving away from the monuments to the history of the ordinary people who make the capitol neighborhood a liveable place conducted by Dr. John Michael Vlach, Professor of American Studies and of Anthropology, Director, Folklife Program, Director, Graduate Studies for the American Studies Department , George Washington University. Wandering around Washington, Dupont Circle, Georgetown, etc..
5. **Hospitality:** Dinner with two Palestinian-American families. Talk about the living conditions and work opportunities of Arab-Americans in the United States.