



Destination

An international mix of graduate and undergraduate students enjoy Turkey, with all the fixings.

In last summer's steamy heat, as Turkey seethed with tension over a suddenly called presidential election, two groups of Brandeisians arrived in Istanbul. The first, comprising thirty-two graduate students, had come to study Turkey's financial markets and institutions. The second, younger delegation had come to neutral territory to meet "the other."

The graduate group—mainly candidates for the master of science in finance (MSF) degree from Brandeis's International Business School—had come for the school's annual World Financial Centers (WFC) program. This kind of intensive, one-week course, which Brandeis holds in major cities worldwide, is surprisingly rare among U.S. business schools, says John Ballantine, director of the MSF program and a leader of the Istanbul program. All MSF students must have already worked in the financial services sector for at least five years, and most continue working while studying part-time. (The full-time students in the Brandeis International Business School's other master's programs spend a semester overseas.) This year's WFC program was the first to be held in an emerging market—one that stood to be affected by the impending presidential election.

The second group, composed of eight undergraduates, most of them Jewish, joined seven Palestinian undergraduates from Al-Quds Univer-

sity in Jerusalem for a ten-day Summer Institute. The program was a component of the Brandeis/Al-Quds partnership, which was first envisioned ten years ago by President Sari Nusseibeh of Al-Quds and Brandeis president Jehuda Reinharz and subsequently funded by the Ford Foundation. Previous Brandeis/Al-Quds projects have featured administrative and faculty exchanges; the Istanbul Summer Institute was the first program to involve students.


The institutions agreed that participants would not mention the Middle East conflict during class. Instead, they examined major texts in considering the question, "What makes a good society?" Still, they remained constantly aware of, as several Brandeis students put it, the looming "elephant in the room."

Both of these programs were examples of "global Brandeis." The term focuses a new spotlight on the university's international involvements, but engagement with global communities goes back to Brandeis's earliest days, says Associate Vice President for Global Affairs Dan Terris, who has recently added that new hat to several others. Exactly fifty years ago, he notes, the university established the Wien Scholars program, one of the nation's first full-scholarship programs for foreign students. Terris is also the university's point man for the Brandeis/Al-Quds partnership.



Istanbul

By Sue Rardin



An interior view of Hagia Sophia, a masterpiece of Byzantine architecture that was for a thousand years the world's largest church.



Students and faculty in the Brandeis/Al-Quds Summer Institute pause in Bayazit Square, near Istanbul University. Seen in background are the main entrance gates of the university, crafted by French architect Auguste Bourgeois in the mid-nineteenth century to house the Ottoman Ministry of Military Affairs.

Vice Provost for Academic Affairs Michael Whelan says that both the WFC program, in being “very hands-on and uniquely crafted,” and the Brandeis/Al-Quds program, in grappling with the “big ideas” of the good society and social justice, show the hallmarks of Brandeis’s particular brand of globalism. The thirty-two participants in the WFC program were globally representative themselves, originating from twenty-two countries. In the Brandeis International Business School (IBS) as a whole, more than 70 percent of today’s students hold citizenship in a country other than the United States.

Why was Istanbul the venue chosen for these events?

For the WFC program, Istanbul offered a chance to study how financial institutions and policies evolve in a rapidly developing economy. Brandeis IBS professor Can (pronounced “John”) Erbil, a Turk himself, designed and helped lead the program, using his own contacts to schedule expert speakers and visits to financial institutions.

For the Brandeis/Al-Quds program, Istanbul represented a “level playing field,” a city that’s predominantly Muslim but a comfortable home to many religions, as well as being culturally unfamiliar to most of the students. It had a more practical value, too, says Whelan, who designed and taught the program’s curriculum with Said Zeedani, vice president for academic affairs at Al-Quds University. Choosing Istanbul made it easier for the Palestinian students—who, having no country, have no passports—to get visas.

But most dramatically, for both programs, Istanbul offered itself.

Spanning the Bosphorus, or Istanbul Strait, it is the only city in the world located on two continents, with architectural treasures dating back through the Ottoman, Byzantine, Roman, and Greek eras. “It could have been a text all by itself,” says Alwina Bennett, assistant provost for graduate affairs, who accompanied the undergraduate group.

During curricular sessions, both groups attended to their subjects. Under the leadership of Erbil and Ballantine, WFC students attended presentations by high-level officials from the Central Bank of Turkey, a commercial bank, and a brokerage firm, as well as by professors from major Turkish universities. They visited Istanbul’s stock exchange on the day it hit an all-time high. They learned that emerging from forty years of very high inflation has enabled the country to attempt, for the first time, a mortgage system. Erbil says that the students, with backgrounds in finance in their own countries, contributed great comparisons during discussions. Observes participant Lynn Cordaro, an American, “That’s one of the appeals of this whole course: you learn from both the students and the professors.”

In their own class periods, the Brandeis/Al-Quds students considered the good society, using readings that probed the powers and responsibilities of civil authorities, the rights and duties of citizens, and the role of individual conscience. Their assigned texts included Sophocles’ *Antigone*, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery,” and pertinent works by Plato, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Martin Luther King Jr., and Zora Neale Hurston. After presentations by Whelan and Zeedani, students led discussions based on the readings. Whelan reports that King, Hurston, and Machiavelli ranked high in students’ interest.

Participants, who ate all their meals together and roomed with students from the other delegation, had been carefully chosen for this experience. Most of the Brandeisians had been to Israel, some many times. One woman had both served in the Israeli Army and campaigned for Israel’s leading peace party. Two students had studied in Cairo. Yael Mazor ’08, the child of an Israeli mother and a Kurdish father, might have been speaking for most of the group when she wrote in her application, “I feel . . . like a bridge for cross-cultural dialogue.”

But bridging wasn’t simple. Class discussions were held in English, which presented a challenge for some of the Palestinians. “And,” observes Garrett Nada ’10, “we’re Brandeis students, used to debating very passionately in class and using our most elegant vocabulary to be persuasive. We started toning it down after the first day—but there was still a gap.”

Then, too, there was that elephant in the room. The Middle East conflict “was definitely there,” says Nada. “So afterward there were a lot of intensive conversations about what everyone was *thinking* while in the room.” Afterward there were sometimes tears, too, says Whelan.

Beyond the classroom, students in both groups enjoyed Istanbul itself. For the Palestinian students—many of whom, Whelan says, probably had never left their homeland before or ridden in a plane or on a ferry—the absence of checkpoints, roadblocks, and curfews was a

for nearly 400 years; and the Grand Bazaar. There were rides on the Bosphorus, and one day, as their leaders enjoy noting, some of the Brandeis/Al-Quds group went to Asia for lunch. For both groups, special dinners provided wonderful food and discussions with local experts, and the prayerful Sufi ritual of whirling dervishes evoked amazement. Both groups also had invaluable assistance from a young Turk, a Brandeis graduate student herself, who accompanied them as an interpreter of language and local life.

For many students, including Cordaro, just walking Istanbul’s streets was fascinating. Cordaro says Erbil’s knowledge and excitement added greatly to her group’s experience of the city. “We loved it because he loves it!” she says.

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One afternoon, the WFC group held an especially penetrating discussion with professors at a local university. The building was located “at zero distance from the Bosphorus,” says Simon Sherrington, Brandeis IBS director of strategic planning, who worked with Erbil in setting up the program. As the French doors of the meeting room were thrown open, he says, the group gazed out at Istanbul’s bridge and Asia beyond, “with the waters of the Bosphorus lapping against the bank beneath us. We could see tankers steaming through, toward the Black Sea and Russia. This is rather a cliché, but Turkey is the bridge between Europe and Asia. That was it. We were there.”

Part of the drama of “being there” for that view across to Asia, in the turmoil right before the election, was knowing that the European Union’s foot-dragging about admitting Turkey might erode the nation’s desire to join. Would the candidate of the mildly Islamic party be elected president, and perhaps help turn Turkey’s eyes away from Europe, east across the Bosphorus, and north? Or would the candidate of the secular, westward-looking parties win?

Cordaro calls the whole WFC experience—curricular and extracurricular—the greatest trip she’s ever been on. “Now,” she says, “I feel as though I’m *from* Turkey. I belong there.” Notably, she wants to explore outsourcing some of her company’s work to Turkey. “India is getting too expensive,” she says.

WFC participant Thomas Reedy, who comes from Ireland, says he gained “an ability to apply what we’ve learned to a new situation, like Turkey.” Reedy, who has made a successful job search since completing the program, says it was useful in that process, too. “Employers ask questions about it during an interview. It’s all about competitive advantage, and this was something unique.”

For students in the Brandeis/Al-Quds Summer Institute, there were, of course, no final conclusions about what makes a good society. Observes Hilla Shimshoni ’10, the former Israeli soldier, “I think [the Palestinians] were disillusioned with American attempts to export our



East meets West at the closing ceremonies of the Summer Institute as delegates from Brandeis and Al-Quds universities accessorize Louis Brandeis T-shirts with Middle Eastern garb.

big thing. Both groups delighted in the city’s monuments and sights—among them the massive sixth-century basilica Hagia Sophia, generally considered the masterpiece of Byzantine architecture and for a thousand years the world’s largest church; the seventeenth-century “Blue Mosque”; the city’s largest synagogue; a Greek Orthodox patriarchal church; the Topkapi Palace, official residence of the Ottoman sultans

version of democracy. And as for us, since it's our reality, we know it works, in one way or another. It's not great, but it works."

Finally, as intended, what mattered most was personal contact. One Palestinian who originally hadn't wanted to attend because he "hated Americans" later wrote in his evaluation:



Western visitors don Palestinian attire for the Summer Institute's wind-up ceremony in Istanbul. Left to right, Michaele Whelan, Alwina Bennett, Yael Mazor '08, Hilla Shimshoni '10, Gabriela Lupatkin '09, and Jessica Kent '09.

"Really the difference was huge. [The Americans were] not like the people in my country. They were totally different . . . We wanted to be careful because our situation is a little bit different from them, [e]specially when we know that most of the[m] are Jewish . . . Day after day, when I spen[t] a lot of time with them I [saw] and notice[d] different things . . . They are friendly, and the most important [thing] I [saw is that] they are very simple, they have a good heart . . . I started to enjoy [being] with this group after a while . . . In the end we share[d] all together our feeling and thoughts and our dreams [for] the future and imagine[d] how we could live in this world with different condition[s]. I want to say that this trip made me very happy and so excited to have met those student[s]."

Still, relationships were affected by the language difference—and by what Brandeisian Jeremy Sherer '10 calls "the info gap." As Nada explains, "We were dealing with different fact books, because our educations are so different, and the sources we get information from. Sometimes you have to just agree to disagree."

Among the most painful subjects trapped in the info gap were beliefs about the existence and extent of the Holocaust. Jessica Kent '09 became exceptionally close to a number of Palestinians and has remained in close e-mail contact with them. With one woman in particular she discussed the Holocaust. Eventually they agreed that each would read one of the other's resources on the subject. Several weeks

into the school year, her friend e-mailed that she'd been reading what Kent gave her and was greatly shaken by it. Kent was much encouraged. But months later, her friend returned to the subject. The others in her community were telling her that Kent was wrong, she said, and in order for her to be part of the community, she had to believe them.

Shimshoni, the Israeli soldier, says, "It was important to finally meet a Palestinian, after twenty-two years. Palestinians live in a region less than two miles away from my home, with a roadblock between us—and we had to travel halfway around the world to meet and talk. The greatest thing that I got from it was, unfortunately, the understanding that 'oh, my God, we are so different.'"

Even with those differences, though, she says, "there was definitely at the end of the day this feeling of 'we want something else. We want to be able to live side by side in some form or another.'"

For ten days, these students did live side by side, as classmates and roommates, and they have much to remember: laughing over lunch together; walking along the shore together; and watching news bulletins on CNN together, discussing what gets shown and what doesn't. They recall hearing, or telling, of hours-long delays at check-points and border crossings, sometimes followed by denials of passage—even to take one's final exams. Sherer recollects learning that his roommate, Palestinian Tareq Nowarah, was "the kind of guy who makes the most of every day," a "great guy," and a "true friend." In her

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evaluation form, Palestinian Nisreen Tirhi reflects, "I was scared at the beginning [about] being able to live with the American students . . . But when I met them all my thoughts flipped 180 degrees, and I was so happy in doing everything with them."

For all of them now, at the very least, "the other" has a face. Speaking of her Palestinian friend, Kent says, "I don't want her to pretend to believe the Holocaust happened, if she really thinks it didn't. I want her to be able to tell me honestly what she thinks. But I want her to look at me and understand how what I believe about the Holocaust has shaped my life as a Jew."

In Turkey's election, the mildly Islamic candidate was elected in a landslide. Feeling unwanted by much of the EU rankles Turks—and Erbil reports that now only about 30 percent approve of accession. "If you don't want us," the thinking goes, "we don't want you." After all, there are plenty of possible Islamic partners nearby. In January 2008, Turkey signed important cooperation agreements with Syria.

The challenge of drawing closer to "the other" lives on.

For more on the Brandeis/Al-Quds Summer Institute, see Garrett Nada's article in Chalav U'Dvash: Brandeis's Journal of Zionist Thought, Winter 2007.