

Al-Quds prof goes to Brandeis

MATT RAND, THE JERUSALEM POST

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Yasser Arafat failed to understand Western mentality and Western culture, according to Al-Quds University Professor Muhammad S. Dajani. Along with four graduate students in Al-Quds's American Studies program, Dajani is spending the next two weeks at Jewish-founded Brandeis University.

Dajani, whose stay at Brandeis is being funded as part of a \$500,000 Ford Foundation Grant meant to bolster Al-Quds University, said he feared that Hamas "will also fail to understand how to deal with the United States."

The trip gives Dajani and his students the opportunity to do research, meet with faculty and take side trips to Harvard Square and the John F. Kennedy Library. Brandeis also intends to help Al-Quds strengthen such areas such as administration, finance, infrastructure and teaching.

Dajani, who founded and directs Al-Quds's American Studies Institute, said the idea for the program came about when he noticed that Al-Quds University decision-makers at the highest level, as well as administrators, didn't really understand Americans, engaged in a lot of stereotyping about them and held a lot of wrong perceptions.

He said a key part of the program is teaching students to think objectively and rationally rather than to "resolve conflict... through ideologies.

"Part of our culture is to be emotional," said Dajani. "So this is when we discuss issues that are very sensitive like the return of [Palestinian] refugees, try to see solutions that are more rational than emotional."

For some, the American Studies program is about learning how the US came to be. Graduate student Urieb Abdel Samad, who also works for the American Friends Service Committee in Ramallah, was amazed how the US "started with nothing." Abdel Samad said she was interested in how Americans "just came from different countries of the world and in a very short time they became the largest power in the world. What is it? What is it about?"

Graduate student Eliana Ziedan, who also teaches English in Bethlehem, seemed to be happy just to have access to a library with more than one million books at Brandeis. She said the one-room library at Al-Quds lacks adequate resources for research, "so we try to make use of being in a nice library like this one that students are lucky to have," she said.

"It's a very courageous type of program," said Daniel Terris, who is coordinating the the trip for Brandeis. Terris heads Brandeis's International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life, which includes Al-Quds University President Sari Nusseibeh on its advisory board. Brandeis President Jehuda Reinharz, who grew up in Haifa, is reportedly friendly with Nusseibeh.

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