

Fulbrighter

The Fulbright Program is a program of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs

Winter 2008



Faiz Ahmed at Oklahoma State University

The Fulbright Program provided the opportunity for 127 new students from the Middle East to come to study at U.S. graduate schools this fall. Students attended Gateway Orientations and were provided an introduction to American culture. The orientations also gave students a chance to interact with other Fulbright grantees from all around the world. Alaa Safi, Palestinian Fulbrighter, remarked, "I now have friends from different parts of the world including India, China, Japan, New Zealand, and many other countries, so I am cross culturing with not only Americans, but also with many other nationalities."

Once the orientations were over, students were excited to start their university programs. Faiz Ahmed, Iraqi grantee, says, "[My] university was more than what I have expected or saw about in the internet, I would say it was just amazing with its healthy environment, green wide yards, friendly people, well organized and modern building, and all these things reflects a satisfactory impression on me." Many other stu-

dents have also commented on the excitement they feel at the start of their programs.

Mr. Safi says, "I am very happy and proud that I got the Fulbright scholarship because it is the dream of many people all over the world. This prestigious scholarship will widen my horizons in many aspects of life. First of all, the Fulbright scholarship will help me achieve my ambition by getting a dual degree from a well known university which will open challenging career gates for me. Second, this scholarship gave me the opportunity to get introduced to the American culture and hence exchanging my culture with them and at the same time improving my English language. Furthermore, through my life in the United States, I will be able to develop my personality by becoming more self dependant, more self managed, more self confident, and more mature. Finally, when I return to my country, I will benefit my society from the things I will learn here and hence developing it."



AMIDEAST
اميد است

FULBRIGHT



Hamed Shares His Love of Country

Hamed Altairi is a Yemeni Fulbright grantee studying at Oakland University

When I came to the United States of America, I expected that people would know something about Yemen or, at least, they would know that there is a country called Yemen, but I discovered that the majority of people that I spoke with knew nothing about the country. I felt very sad that my country was unknown to them. The attack of September 17, 2008 against the American Embassy in Sana'a made me even sadder and more frustrated because shortly before the incidence I had given a talk where I stressed that Yemen is one of the most peaceful and interesting countries on earth. In fact, I began to realize that I must make a commitment to change the bad image of Yemen and tell people not to look at Yemen from one side, ignoring the other side.

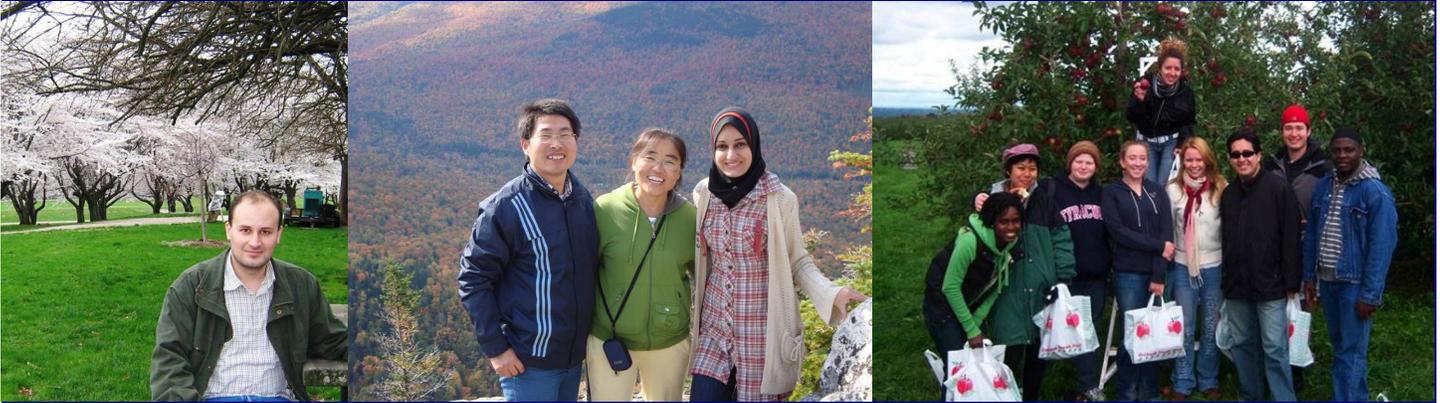
The international office at the university announced to students that there would be opportunities for those who had an interest to do presentations in one of the nearby schools about their countries. I was really happy to participate in that opportunity. First, it was a place to start to educate people about my country. Second, it was a great opportunity for me to get to know more people and to experience teaching American children.

I prepared my presentation and delivered it. It contained three parts. The first part was a short quiz. The purpose of the quiz was to test students' knowledge about Yemen and to match their answers with what they learned in the presentation. The second part was a power point presentation discussing different topics: the location, climate, people, money, traditions, food, religion, etc. It was really interesting as the students were involved, excited and curious. Some students tried on wearing the "Habwah" a traditional costume used to help a person when he sits on the ground. The children really liked it. The third part was a video presentation about Yemen. At the end of the presentation, I taught the students some Arabic words.

Students and teachers at the schools got a better understanding about Yemen, and I felt that I did something for my country. In order to give a good perception of my country, I am still going to do presentations, write articles, and educate people. Finally, Fulbrighters are ambassadors for their countries and they have to draw good pictures of their countries. On top of this, they have to be proud of their cultures. As an ambassador of my country, I am trying to positively promote my culture.

Congratulations to Winter 2008 Graduates!

Lina Adwan, West Bank, MS Pharmaceutical Studies, University of Rhode Island
Sarah Bou Ajram, Lebanon, MA International and Comparative Education, Columbia Teachers College
Ziyad Almunifi, Saudi Arabia, LLM, University of California, Los Angeles
Samia Badih, Lebanon, MA Broadcast Journalism, University of Maryland at College Park
Yassine Benjira, Morocco, MS Computer Science, University of Southern California
Myriam Chemaou, Morocco, MA Integrated Marketing Communications, Northwestern University
Nadia Merzaa, Bahrain, MS Computer Science, Illinois Institute of Technology
Ramzi Qaabar, West Bank, MS Information Systems, Carnegie Mellon University



Ramzi Asali (R), Jathla Ahmed (M) , and Lamis Sleiman (R) enjoy the fall season.

Student Updates

Fatima Alwadi, Yemen, participated in the preparations of the International Day of Peace celebration, which was sponsored and initiated by the CONTACT program where she works. She sent invitations to the entire SIT and World Learning staff, faculty and students as well as the community of Brattleboro to participate in the celebration, and spoke to people face to face to encourage them to participate. During the event and the following week they asked people to express their visions for peace on small flags.

Abdullah Fannir, Libya, represents the International Relations Office at the Health Administration department of the University of Scranton. He establishes student-to-student mentoring opportunities between first and second year students and creates ways to maximize international student involvement and bridge the gap between domestic and international students. He helped host social events such as the celebration of Eid and sports outings with domestic students and professors. Abdullah also helped plan the Saudi Students Day On Campus, a huge social event that highlighted Saudi culture and Arab food.

Ahmed Herar, Syria, was featured in the Fall issue of Interact, the newsletter of the Florida State University International Center. Through the International Friends Program at the university he was matched with Robert and Melanie Levings, a family from Tallahassee. The program matches new international students at FSU with domestic students and people from the community for the purpose of building friendships and sharing cultures.

Sherif El Negahy, Egypt, was accepted for an internship at the LA superior court's Alternate Dispute Resolution Department. This allows him full access to their materials and cases and to meet with judges and learn from their experience in arbitration and mediation. Mr. El Negahy was invited to meet with Kenneth Starr, the Dean of the Pepperdine Law School and was featured on the Pepperdine website.

Mahmood Khoshnaw, Iraq, was featured on the Ohio University website and was recognized at Ohio University's International Sponsored Student Reception. One hundred and five international scholars from 36 countries and 14 exchange programs were recognized for obtaining nationally competitive awards in their home countries.

Lamis Sleiman, Lebanon, is working with the Moynihan Institute for Middle Eastern Politics and hopes to publish soon. She is also working for a partnership between Maxwell and the American University in Beirut in international relations, political studies, and Middle Eastern studies along with the faculty and professors. She has attended several events for Maxwell Fulbrighters including a meeting of fellows and a Broadway Musical.

Adila Hanieh, recently published a book called "PALESTINE- Rien ne Nous Manque Ici" (Palestine– We Lack for Nothing Here). More information can be found at http://www.cercladart.com/catalogue_ouvrages/9782702208854_palestine_rien_ne_manque_ici.





Student Updates Continued

Mokhles El Sysy, Egypt, is the new assistant coach of the “Talk to Tucker” girls soccer team. The team plays in the Greater Lafayette Recreational Soccer Alliance’s U12 Girls League. Mokhles also accompanied a class from West Lafayette Community School on a field trip to Megis Orchard.

Abdul-Wahab Kayyali, Jordan, has been an avid oud player for over 18 years and looked for opportunities to play on campus at the University of Chicago. He rehearses with the Middle East Music Ensemble with some very well established musicians in the Chicago area and hopes to play in the performances.

Faiz Ahmed, Iraq, went with the Iraqi Students Association at Oklahoma State University to the Oklahoma city center for Eid Al Fitr celebrations. He also participated in the on-campus international food day and was interviewed by the O’Colligan newspaper about his country, home and family.

Diaa Alqusairi, Syria, participated in a cultural program called International Speakers Students Bureau, which gives students the opportunity to do presentations about their countries in the community. She will present in local schools. She also joined Global Connect and will soon be connected with an American student. Ms. Alqusairi joined the Community Emergency Response Team, a local endeavor to respond to emergencies and help victims within the early days of a disaster.

New Students Give Their First Impressions of Life in the U.S.

“My first impression is about myself. I’ve never thought that I could quite easily pass for a Latino-American! In the Fulbright Gateway Program in Miami, Florida, I was surprised at the hotel assistants who started to speak Spanish with me right away assuming I’m from Columbia or from Peru! The United States is a quite SPACIOUS country! I’m appalled sometimes at the distances you have to cover from one place to another. I believe the comparison between the United States and Egypt is not a fair one. One is a country, the other is a “continent”. The Americans, in general, are very friendly people. It almost happens everyday that you find people saying “hi” down the street if you’re walking and there’s eye contact! I remember being confused at where the main entrance of the library is. Then a man offered help as he noticed me in confusion! The Americans, compared to Europeans, are considerably informal. You can call people you’ve only met minutes ago by their first name. Americans dress quite informally (especially in the area where I live). I had to smile to find some senior employee in the Book Depository with a gray beard and a pair of shorts and a sport shoes!” ~Aladdin Mahmoud, Egypt

“My initial impressions are good. I am trying to get acclimated to graduate level work; which is proving more challenging than I had initially thought. I am looking forward to completing my degree in June.” ~Abdul-Wahab Kayyali, Jordan

“Well, my first impression is that the US is a beautiful place, the people are friendly, and my university is a wonderful place I always dreamed of. I’ll do my best to be a good representative of both the Fulbright program and my country.” ~Jathla Ahmed, Iraq

“Ever since [arriving] it was great. Everything was going so great and smoothly, from settling in to classes. People here are so nice and friendly and they helped me a lot in my first week here and until now. I have been invited to American dinners a lot. Since this is a small city, I think that I visited a good percentage of the houses here. People were very excited about my being from Syria, because I am the first international student from Syria so far. Every one was happy to ask me about Syria and I was happy to answer the questions.” ~Diaa Alqusairi, Syria



The Weeks Before the Election



Mokhles El Sysy is an Egyptian Non-degree Fulbrighter at Purdue University.

Experiencing the American Presidential Election of 2008 live and in-person was very different from watching it on television half-way across the world. Things got heated as both candidates tried to win voters to their sides. It was getting hot, but it would not burn your hand if you touched it. Americans were looking forward to choosing a president who would lead their nation for the next four years; a president who would take the lead in a very critical time, not only for the USA, but also for the whole world. With Election Day only a few steps away, many Americans became restless as each party enthusiastically supported its candidate. The US showed the world that it is civilized enough to carry out this election in a peaceful, organized manner, even with emotions flaring.

There are four major steps in the American election for about 12 months which make it different from any other election. The first step is the primary. This is when each party decides on a candidate that they will all support against the candidate from the other party. The second step is the convention. This is when delegates from each state declare which presidential candidate it will support. The third step is the campaign, which continues up until Election Day. Each candidate uses all of their power to advertise and promote themselves for President of the United States. They try to sell their ideas and policies using every means possible. They hold live debates against one another and they visit almost every major city in America trying to win voters. Then, finally, step number four is actual Election Day. On November 4th, American voters went to the polls and ultimately chose the man who will lead this nation for the next 4 years.

America is one step from opening a new chapter in its history. Americans chose an African American president which has never happened before in American history. I think Martin Luther King, Jr. would be very proud if he was around to see how far African Americans have come. This is the true realization of a democratic nation and this is what democracy is all about.

Presidential Inauguration 2009: A New Birth of Freedom



Inauguration Day is the day on which the President of the United States is sworn in and officially takes office. The Presidential Inauguration will be held on January 20, 2009 in Washington, D.C. The theme for the 2009 presidential inauguration will be "A New Birth of Freedom" which reflects the historic election of Senator Barack Obama. The oath of office is traditionally administered on the steps of the United States Capitol. The oath states:

"I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

Following the oath, the President will give his inaugural address where he discusses his vision for America and goals for the nation. There will also be a Presidential Inauguration Parade which will also take place on January 20, 2009, to honor the newly sworn in President and Vice President. The parade includes a procession of ceremonial military regiments, citizen's groups, marching bands, and floats. The inauguration parade is open to the public and will be televised.

Fulbright Students React to Presidential Elections

On November 4, 2008, Americans went to the polls and Barack Obama was elected to become the 44th President of the United States. Fulbright students reflect on this historic moment:

Election Night was a historic evening, an epic event, and an experience I will never forget... it was such a heartfelt joy, a communal celebration that not only belonged to the US but to the entire world as well. I felt privileged to be standing there witnessing new pages of history being written. Obama's speech and charisma brought tears to my eyes and filled me with hope and inspiration. I spent the next day reading the newspapers, listening to Obama's speech over and over again. The tone of his voice and his eloquence, the choice of words, the meaning was so mesmerizing. I feel that now more than ever I dare to dream of a better world. I dare to dream that my country, Lebanon, might have an ever-lasting peace and prosperity if Obama succeeds in planting seeds of diplomacy, communication and peace in the Middle East and the world. Above all, Obama's words carried the same message as Senator William Fulbright's: "increase the chance that nations will learn at last to live in peace and friendship."~**Carla Haibi, Lebanon**

From the moment that I heard Mr. Barack Obama speaking for the first time, he became a hero and an example to me. All of his speeches were full of inspiration, wisdom and strong will. Listening to him always widens my views and encourages me to work harder. I see Mr. Obama's election to the presidency of the United States of America as a major, new proof of the greatness of this nation and its people. As he said once: "My story would have never happened in another country." America and the American people rewarded him for the amazing person that he is and gave him their trust and confidence to be their leader in such a hard time. This shows how much courage and dedication the American people have to rise up and support their country. I congratulate the people of the United States of America for their choice of the new president. And I'm looking forward for years of peace, growth of cultural interaction, and support between the United States and the people of other nations in the world. ~**Nart Makhsida, Syria**

November 4, 2008, will definitely go down as one of the most memorable events of my life. I am so happy and grateful at having been given this opportunity to study in the USA and in my mind to have the opportunity to have witnessed history. It's not about who won the election but the way both candidates handled themselves after the elections. This is something I feel the rest of the world, especially the Arab World and Africa, need to understand and to hopefully emulate. Coming to the USA in 2007, I had so many reservations about the USA and was worried about how I would be treated or about how I would be able to convey my sentiments about the USA with regards to their policy in the Middle East. This has changed throughout my time here. I woke up the morning after the election and realized the USA is truly the beacon of democracy to the rest of the world. The American people have truly inspired me and I cannot thank them enough. I envy the American people and I wish someday that our part of the world will also bear witness to something as momentous as what happened two days ago. God Bless America. ~**Hussain Al Noumani, Oman**

I would write pages and pages about what I observed here in the States during the election and especially the elections day. I had overwhelming feelings watching the Americans change their country. For someone like me who came from a country where there is no democracy and no freedom, it's amazing to see the power of people when they are free. Democracy is a magical effective tool when used properly. No one can argue that America restored some self-confidence after Obama's election. Watching the Americans celebrating their victory especially young Americans who voted for the first time in their lives, is one of the life time experiences I will carry with me all my life. I am grateful to having this opportunity to live a historic unforgettable moment in the history of America. I hope one day I and my young fellow Syrians can do what the Americans did and change our country to the best. ~**Amer Doko, Syria**

I think that the election of Obama is a great symbol for humanity. It opens up possibilities, not only for the United States but for the entire world. Change is no longer something we hope for, change CAN happen. ~**Mounia Tagma, Morocco**

With people from my program and professors from my school, I canvassed for Obama in New Hampshire, a neighboring state that was considered a swing state and where Obama finally won. As an International student, I feel lucky to be in the US in this historical moment when not only the first black person is elected for the White House, but also a strong and inspiring leader come to power promising a more progressive United States and a better world. As a Tunisian person who belongs to the Arab world, now I can start to have hope for a more peaceful Middle East and more serene world. Congratulation again for the new leader of the United States... Obama !! ~**Safia Trabelsi, Tunisia**

It was such an exciting experience to watch both candidates step up on stage and end a two-year race with all grace and dignity. I loved that. This is 'The America' that everybody wishes to see all the time, an exemplary democracy. As President-elect Obama said, the true strength of America comes not from the might of its arms, or the scale of its wealth; it comes from the enduring power of the American ideals and democracy. The most significant thing that I have learned on November the 4th, is that Americans really can choose who they want, and they can change this whole world into a better one when they want, and that's very hopeful, and exciting at the same time. This does not mean that one candidate was better than the other one, but the idea of choosing "the one" Americans believe will bring change is just so powerful. After all, what happened during the last two years and ended yesterday, is such a great lesson for us to learn from. This is how I want to see Yemen and Yemenis in the near future, I know how difficult it is to follow the example of the U.S, but as Obama said...YES WE CAN. ~**Ameen Sanad, Yemen**

Today has been one of my happiest days here in the USA! I feel thrilled, and jealous, for the magnificence of the American people. And I believe that change will positively affect not only Americans, but also the Arab world. More than ever before I believe that my study and training here will help me to improve the life of my people back home. My aspiration is ignited with the success Obama has been able to achieve. I believe that the next administration will help our people to better understand the truth of the American culture and civilization, just in the way, we as Fulbrighters, now hold. I believe your pioneer efforts in this field has been in a vanguard rank, which I really appreciate...I can say nothing but thank you from the depth of my heart. ~**Suleiman T. Mohammad, Jordan**

I drove with one of my friends to Chicago to attend Obama's acceptance and victory celebration held in Grant Park. I was so excited that I felt as if I were an American celebrating democracy with joy and happiness. It was one of my most unforgettable experience in the U.S. Like the other Americans in the celebration, I screamed with delight "Live Long America". The democratic environment which America offers all is so fascinating and interesting. I am very proud of how American democracy reflected itself clearly in the speeches of both Obama and McCain after the announcement of the election results. I wish I could have the same democracy back in our home countries in the Middle East. Attending such a great moment in the American history made me realize the importance of taking advantage of the American experience in promoting politics in our countries after completion of our studies in the U.S. It is our duty to return to our countries and help enrich them with our personal, cultural, and political experiences gained in the U.S. I

Cultural Exchange: Opportunities to Travel

Many Fulbrighters take advantage of their university holidays by traveling throughout the U.S.



The City That Never Sleeps: New York

Hanna Chalhoub is a Lebanese grantee studying at the University of Arizona

To begin, my plane wasn't allowed to land because of the storm that took over the city that night. The flight was delayed for more than four hours. Upon landing I couldn't help but go directly to bed in the city that never sleeps. After an enormous breakfast at my friend's apartment, where I was debriefed about the city and given directions, I took the subway heading downtown. It was here where I stopped enjoying the fresh air of that cloudy Manhattan morning in August. The subway is far from hygienic; in fact it hardly reflects the image of such an enchanting island. Garbage is everywhere and bad smells reign, yet the subway is always crowded by New Yorkers and New comers.

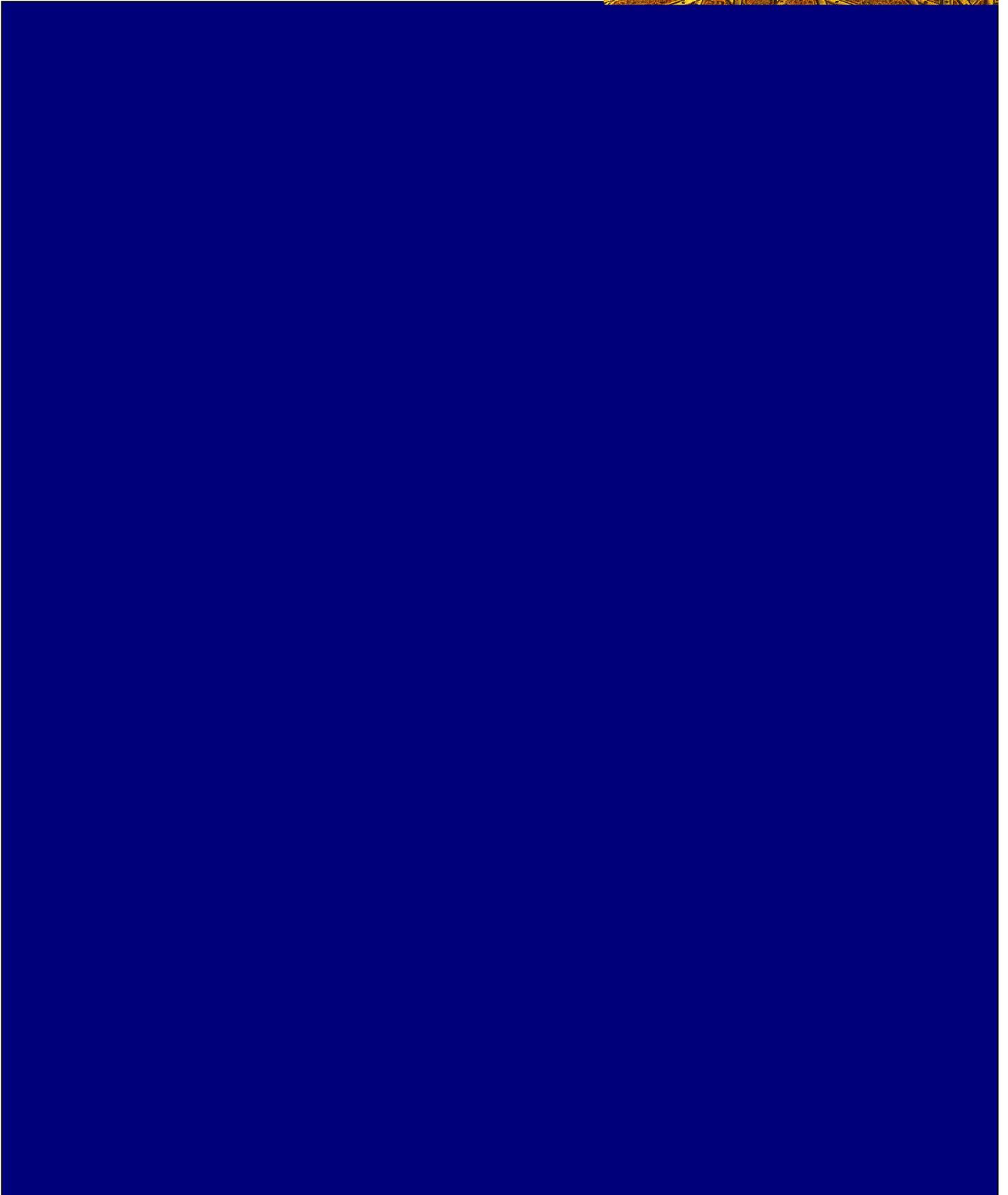
I got to Tribeca and started walking. I visited Ground Zero of The World Trade Center, Trinity church, Wall Street, City Hall, Whitehall, Battery Park, where I waved to the Statue of Liberty, China Town and the Brooklyn Bridge. This region of Manhattan is called downtown. It is immense, fascinating and very well organized. In this region, I searched for but couldn't find any signs of melancholy, even the old surfaces of the neglected buildings were vivid. The streets were full of tourists and the restaurants and cafés were full of business people. In this respect, New York gave me the impression that it was a city out of this world. Around five hours onward, fatigue had eaten into me. Neither the captivating skyscrapers nor the tenderness of that sun would make me forget my pains... I was obliged to take the subway back home.

After this long but lively day, I had dinner in a fancy Chinese restaurant in Greenwich Village. We then joined a friend at "Nikki beach" night club in Midtown where jetsetters party all night, every night. This place reminded me of the Beirut nightlife. Although it was fun, I still much prefer the nightclubs of Beirut. During the weekend some friends joined us from Washington D.C. and together we tried some stylish restau-

rants and cafés ("Friend of a Farmer" for a traditional American brunch, café "Lalo" for a tasty French patisserie --this is where some scenes of "you've got mail" were filmed--, and "TAO" an Asian restaurant and bar known for its exotic eastern drinks).

Although my agenda was filled with museum visits, I was only able to visit the Museum of Modern Art and the American Museum of Natural History. I spent more than four hours in front of the paintings and sculptures exhibited in the first museum, especially those of Picasso. As for the second museum, I visited twice on two different occasions because I wanted to watch all the movies and visit every exhibition. The pictures and sculptures may have seemed a bit silly, but the live exhibitions and the movies were fascinating. After a true American dinner with two new Dutch friends, we ventured together to Times Square. Although I have seen it before in movies and magazines, it is still astonishing. The density of light is unbelievable and together with the colors make Times Square a majestic place.

I believe Times Square alone is the reason why it is said that this city never sleeps. Yet, in my experience, the city does indeed sleep. After midnight I found it difficult to come across a 24-hour café or restaurant. After finally stumbling upon one, my friends and I sat until 4 a.m. and enjoyed an intimate little chat in the cool breeze that surrounds the island in the early morning. The back streets of the greatest city in the whole world were quite disappointing and I found myself disheartened. Homeless people sleep on the sides of the roads, bad odors strike the commuters, and garbage is disgustingly piled high in front of buildings... It appeared to me that New York is indeed a city of this world and it has perhaps more miserable scenes than any other. Time had come for me to return to my sweet and lovely city of Tucson, but my trip to New York was one of my best vacations ever.





Cultural Exchange: My First American Wedding

Lamis Sleiman is a Lebanese Fulbright grantee studying at Syracuse University

Coming to the United States was more than a dream come true! Arriving in New York was a childhood ambition, because there I would be able to see the stars in between the endless walls of the skyscrapers. This is New York, and upstate New York has its own flavor too.

Fulbright gave me the chance not just to explore a new country, the "land of opportunities" as it is commonly known, but also reminded me that culture is something intangible, evolving and ever changing. I wanted to embrace every cultural opportunity that was intertwining in New York's great cities, including Syracuse where I live and study at the moment. Syracuse, New York is well known for its lakes and water diversity, its bi weekly cultural festivals, its grand theatre, its old and classy downtown, and its quiet neighborhoods. With every wind breeze, there is an event bringing all sorts of people together for leisure, fun, and cultural exposure. And with fun, you meet many friends and people. Therefore, socializing becomes your mission, and networking becomes your game.

Socializing actually led me to be the only Arab invitee to an American wedding of one of my colleague's friends. I wondered how would Americans dress up for weddings, what the ceremony would be like, and what are the similarities and differences that Americans share with the Lebanese in that regards. Enthusiasm was all over me, for experiencing the culprit of any culture: marriage ceremonies.

I dressed up in my French Chanel dress, got my hair fixed, and put on a lot of makeup like I would normally do in Lebanon without forgetting-of course- my expensive jewelry and... And my American friend was shocked! He was afraid that I would outlook the bride and the bridesmaids because I over dressed and my makeup was way beyond what American ladies would wear for such an occasion.

The church ceremonies were very similar to what we see in Lebanon except for a major difference: the priest was a female, and it was my first time ever that I see a female priest(ess). I was trying to hide my confusion, but apparently my friend too is unfamiliar with female priests as well. It was very genuine and inspiring to us, as we thought that gender equality should also be based at the heart of religion, which is the opium of people!

Hours later, we went to the reception close to a nearby lake. The general medium was overwhelmed with simple decorations, fair light, an open bar, old American 70s music, and moderately dressed people. My friend was right, maybe I looked a bit outlandish compared to the majority of the invitees. However, comparing that to Lebanon, Chanel is not a dress to wear for a wedding; girls usually wear long beaded gowns, overdo their makeup and hair, put on the nicest accessories, and look like the middle age princesses. Moreover, the reception decorations are much bigger, brighter, and glittery. Flowers cover the tables and the floors, the pathways, and the isles, and transform any cement hall into a fairy tale garden. The music is usually a hybrid of many classics, with a bit of Arabic *Tarab* and *Dabkeh*, which mark the cultural aspect of the wedding. And I surely missed the first entrance of the bride and the groom! In Lebanon, the Zaffah, or the main entrance is the show of the wedding! It is a group of 12 dancers and musicians paving the entrance for the newly weds with a folkloric Egyptian/Lebanese music that would give the audience a goose bump. The Zaffeh is usually accompanied by every single member of the newly weds' families clapping and chanting. Our American entrance was a simple, decent, and joyful entrance of just the bride and her groom, and no one else. I asked in wonder, but where is everyone? Why are they still in their seats? And then I realized the individualistic dimension of the American wedding as compared to the collectivist nature of Arab weddings, where everyone welcomes the stars of the show! Fascinating indeed! Simplicity made more elegance than all the sparkles of the weddings I have been to.

We had our dinner, and it was time to dance! In Lebanon and in most parts of the Arab world, the *Dabkeh* is the major folkloric dance in which everyone becomes involved in one coherent motion -in a single loop. In America, I found a matching phenomenon: The Electric Slide! I learned the steps, and I immersed myself between the celebrating people! Soon enough I was able to dance to the beats of Macarena, the Chicken Dance, and other American Wedding specials. The similarity was striking, although the beats were different, and the moves were more western than oriental belly dancing! But the Electric Slide brought people together under one theme, just like our famous *Dabkeh*. For seconds, I felt that I was home but only among people who speak mostly English.

The wedding party was coming to an end. I ran to the ladies room, put my hair down, wiped out some of my makeup and came back to the dancing arena looking simpler than how I came. Maybe I wanted to fit in, and maybe I wanted to grasp the moment without being ethnocentric and possessed by images. In all cases, I wanted to be part of a culture that is rich with its simplicity, shining with its diversity, and transparent with its kind people.

This wedding marks an American cultural benchmark in my heart and memory. It really revealed many aspects of this culture that the movies and Hollywood did not depict. I learned a lot by observing, admiring, and being free. This was simply my *First American Wedding!*

Reflections on the Fulbright Experience



Ramzi Asali is a Palestinian Fulbrighter pursuing his MA in International Development at Ohio University

Since I was preparing my application for the Fulbright Scholarship, I have been aware of the important cultural component of this scholarship. I found it as a great opportunity to be an ambassador of my home country, to explore the American culture, and to counter the efforts of fanatics all over the world who believe in clash of civilizations. I have been in the United States since August 2007, and my experience is so far very rich and rewarding. I have managed to reconcile between the need to achieve an excellent academic performance (My GPA is 4.0) and the need to engage in cultural activities that promote more understanding between the American and Palestinian peoples. I have gained important skills and knowledge that will help me to participate in the development of my home country, and I have also gone through invaluable cultural experiences that broadened my mind and enriched my experience in life.

One of these invaluable experiences is my direct interaction with the American people whom I found very good-hearted, accessible, and eager to know about other cultures. I provided them with information about the Palestinian culture and values that are usually overshadowed by information about the conflict in the area. I also tried to remove misconceptions and stereotypical images about the Palestinian and Islamic cultures. In my classes, I always cite Palestine as a case study in order to inform my fellow students about the political, social, and economic situation in Palestine. Moreover, one of my unforgettable experiences was when I visited one of the schools in Providence-Rhode Island with other Fulbrighters and I discussed with students many issues related to my home country. I was quoted on how to bridge cultural gaps between the Palestinian and American people by the main newspaper in Providence, which made me very happy because my message could reach a larger number of people.

Another nice experience that I would like to talk about is my internship experience during the summer. I carried out my internship at one of Washington, DC's NGOs that works primarily for the benefit of the Palestinian people. My experience in DC was amazing. I moved from my small university town in Ohio to the nation's capital. This transition enriched and diversified my experience in the United States. Most importantly, I was hosted for 10 weeks by one of the American families that I got to know by couch-surfing. This exposed me to the real daily life of American families that I would have never been able to know about if I had been visiting the United States as a tourist. I engaged with several discussions about my home country and my culture with my host family and their friends, and I believe that I managed to make a difference in their knowledge. I invited them to visit me in Palestine next year and they accepted my invitation.

Finally, I am very excited that my presence in the United States coincided with the American elections. I attended, for example, a lecture by the former American President Bill Clinton who was campaigning for his wife Hillary during the primaries. I also attended a lecture by

Michelle Obama who was campaigning for her husband Barack Obama. These events made me better understand and live the American political life. I look forward to engaging in more cultural experiences, to know more about the American culture and society, to visit new American states, and, last but not least, to keep my GPA of 4.0 .



Katia Hameg is an Algerian Fulbrighter pursuing her MATESOL at Saint Michael's College.

I have been in the USA for three months so far, and I don't spend a day without reflecting, for a short while, on this awesome experience. I have the honor of receiving the Fulbright scholarship, and I would like to comment on this, first as a woman and second as a teacher. There are some reasons why I would like to stress on these two matters.

I come from a country, or let us generalize the concept, from a continent, where only education or instruction can help a woman to be independent, autonomous, capable of acting and not reacting, and last but not least equal to any individual in the community. However, in order for us to have a say or a share in our families, communities or societies, we find ourselves struggling day and night to make everyone to hear and listen to our voices.

Thanks to the education and the instruction I have received, I was able to study and work as any other responsible individual. I have had to leave my family to pursue my university studies at the capital which is far from my home city. It was unbelievable for our mothers to do as such in the past. It is a commonly agreed-upon fact that women play an important role in developing countries as one of the main sources of sustenance for their families, communities and societies.

As I have said earlier, I have the honor to receive the Fulbright scholarship. While I was preparing the whole entrepreneurship, I usually came across important phrases and messages. Some of these latter refer to "bridging cultures", "the sky is the limit" and "through education, we can build different societies with a universal humanity". We may interpret the above phrases regarding our cultures and roots, but what is important is that thanks to such opportunities, we are able to learn from other's success in order to help our fellows to succeed in their daily lives.

Try to imagine the following scene. *The Fulbright program is a torch which is transmitted through ages and generations.* As we are new Fulbright grantees, we swear or promise to pass that torch to other people and help them illuminate their way to reach their goals. This *human chain* would not be possible without any instruction or learning. And it is at this point that the whole Fulbright spirit emerges. We find ourselves as small slots in this chain that are ready to mark one's path in this everlasting educational adventure and pass the torch to the next generation of Fulbrighters.

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AMIDEAST Headquarters Happenings

The past several months have been eventful for the AMIDEAST Fulbright staff. We're pleased to welcome new Program Officer Zeb Simpson and new interns Claudia Mercado, Stephanie Whitlatch, and Marta Latinatova.

Senior Program Officer, Josephine Griffin, spent a week in Tripoli, Libya meeting with 12 nominees for one-on-one consultations on the university choices. Some of the fields of study are: Solar Energy, Telecommunications, Digital Architecture, and Hydrology. She also spent time training the Embassy staff on the process for Fulbright applications. Program Officer Elisa O'Keefe visited AMIDEAST/Tunis in October. She met individually with each of the 12 new Fulbright nominees to discuss their university selections. In addition, Elisa, along with several alumni and AMIDEAST staff, held a post-nomination orientation session for the nominees. They discussed the application and finalization process and the alumni answered many questions about living and studying in the U.S. Elisa also went to Pittsburgh, PA,

in November to attend the regional NAFSA conference. While she was there, she visited with three Fulbright grantees studying in Pittsburgh: Suleiman T. Mohammad, Amer Doko, and Hamad Al-Rayes.

Program Officer Heather Hughes visited eight universities in California last month searching for suitable placements for future AMIDEAST students. She also had the opportunity to meet with several of her new students from Iraq and Algeria, including Habeeb Habeeb, Fatima Khitous, and Zahraa Hammood. Program Officer Bina Sheladia and Program Assistant Esther Kauffman attended the Binational Fulbright Commission pre-departure orientation in Egypt this summer. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet the students, prepare them for their arrival, and connect with BFCE staff. Bina also traveled to Michigan where she met with Abubaker Haddud, Ilham Belkheir, Ghassan Matar, and Kaoutar Tbatou as well as university representatives.

