Lebanon Student Fellowship
Cultural and Educational Exchange Experience for Model Arab League Alumni

June 20 – July 2, 2012

FELLOWSHIP YEAR REVIEW
Projects Overview
July 2012 – July 2013
Lebanon Study Visit Fellowship – Summer 2012
Partnership between the Lebanon Renaissance Foundation and the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations

Mr. Peter Billerbeck – {Pgs. 4-6}
- Article ~ “The U.S. Should Not Intervene Militarily in Syria,” Georgetown Journal of International Affairs
- Event ~ “Challenges for Lebanon: Beyond the Headlines,” Georgetown University

Mr. George Hampton Cokeley – {Pgs. 7-8}
- Lecture ~ Presentation of Study Visit and Research Findings, The Citadel Military College of SC
- Event ~ “The Lebanon I Dream of” film viewing, The Citadel Military College of SC
- Lecture ~ Fourth Class Cadets, The Citadel Military College of SC
- Lecture ~ Society of Citadel Libertarians, The Citadel Military College of SC
- Lecture ~ Heritage Foundation Intern Cohort, Washington, DC

Ms. Michelle Cousland
**No projects completed

Mr. Juan Garcia – {Pg. 9}
- Lecture ~ Model Arab League Donor Dinner, University of Houston Clear Lake
- Lecture ~ “Lebanon in the Modern Day,” University of Houston Clear Lake
- Online Mention ~ “UH Clear Lake Graduate Student Receives Study Abroad Experience,” University of Houston Clear Lake Communications; Reposted at ultimateclearlake.com, twylah.com, and loku.com

Ms. Holly Jordan LaFountain – {Pgs. 10-12}
- Online Mention ~ College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences News2Note, Virginia Tech.
- Online Mention ~ ASPECT Program News and Events, Virginia Tech.
- Lecture ~ Judaism Christianity and Islam course, Virginia Tech.
- Lecture ~ ASPECT Program Research Methods course, Virginia Tech.
- Lecture ~ ASPECT Program Global Governance course, Virginia Tech
- Lecture ~ Introduction to Politics course, Radford University

Ms. Laura Kisthardt – {Pgs. 13-19}
- Online Mention ~ WRA News Archive, Western Reserve Academy
- Online Mention ~ JCU Newsroom, John Carroll University
- Article ~ “Exploring Lebanon,” Hudson Weekly
- Article ~ “JCU Student Spends Part of Summer in Lebanon,” The Carroll News
- Lecture ~ Middle East History course, Western Reserve Academy
- Lecture ~ US Foreign Policy in the Middle East course, John Carroll University
- Lecture ~ Arabic 201 course, John Carroll University
- Lecture ~ Post-Conflict Resolution course, John Carroll University
- Lecture ~ Hudson Library and Historical Society, Hudson, OH
- Lecture ~ Campus Presentation, collaboration with Middle East Student Assn., John Carroll University
- Lecture ~ French Club, Western Reserve Academy
Ms. Aubrey McMahan – {Pgs. 20-23}
- Online Mention ~ College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Grand Valley State University
- Lecture ~ International House Living Center, Grand Valley State University
- Lecture ~ Arab Culture course (in Arabic), Grand Valley State University
- Lecture ~ Civil Conflicts in Africa course, Grand Valley State University
- Lecture ~ Islamic Middle East Honors course, Grand Valley State University
- Lecture ~ Liberal Arts 100 course, Grand Valley State University
- Article ~ “White Lake Resident Receives 1 of 10 Fellowships for Travel to Lebanon,” Spinal Column Newspaper
- Cultural Event ~ JayCees June Meeting and Picnic, Farmington, MI
- Lecture ~ Arabic Language Program Participants, Oman

Mr. Robert Nixon – {Pgs. 24-28}
- Online Mention ~ “Honors Student to Study in Lebanon this Summer” Bloomsburg University News
- Article Series ~ “The ‘Near East’ Awaits,” “Beirut: The Living City,” and “The Study Begins – A Journey and Meetings,” Bloomsburg University website feature
- Article ~ “BU Student Attends School Program to Lebanon,” The Voice Student Newspaper, Bloomsburg University

Ms. Jordan Ring – {Pgs. 29-32}
- Article ~ The Conglomerate Student Newspaper, Centenary College
- Online Mention ~ “Student Travels to Lebanon for Fellowship on U.S.-Arab Relations,” External Relations Department, Centenary College of Louisiana
- Article ~ Letter to the Editor
- Lecture ~ church group
- Program ~ “Beirut to Shreveport through a Democratic Lens” Photograph Exhibition Project
***NEED TO REVIEW EMAILS***

Mr. Klevis Xharda – {Pgs. 33-34}
- Lecture ~ DoSO Student Organization, Northeastern University
- Lecture ~ Greek Orthodox Youth Association, St. Vasilios Greek Orthodox Church
- Lecture ~ Mock Trial Classes (3), Peabody Veterans Memorial High School
- Lecture ~ National Honors Society, Peabody Veterans Memorial High School
The U.S. Should Not Intervene Militarily in Syria

As the crisis in Syria continues to escalate, Guiza offers views of different possible responses to the crisis. Below, Peter Billerbeck offers his perspective. You can read his perspective here.

We must seek a way to end the ongoing crisis in Syria which has now become an all-out civil war with tragic proportions. Most recent reports place the death toll at over 35,000 and the number of dead and imprisoned continue to increase by the day.

This growing crisis of astonishingly tragic proportions has led for many, now dead or injured, to the conclusion that the use of military intervention by the United States is the only solution to the situation. Proposals for such an intervention range from the conventional to the desperate, but many of these proposals have been met with skepticism and even outright opposition.

The United States has the capability to intervene militarily in Syria, but doing so would only lead to greater chaos and destruction on the ground. The potential for further civilian casualties is enormous, and the risks of such an intervention are too high for the United States to consider.

First, a no-fly zone necessarily entails significant strikes against regime-held air defense capabilities, often placed in and around population centers and contested areas. Risky for civilians, opposition fighters and pilots alike, a no-fly zone would necessitate strikes in contested areas and the assumption of a potentially enduring ground presence operation, in the event of a declared U.S. ground war.

Second, the prospect of creating a “safe zone” in Syria to provide flight to refugees, safe haven and opposition leadership, key to the stability of the region, and the protection of innocent civilians, is a mirage. For example, rebels’ control areas are often contested and subject to frequent shelling and air strikes.

The Afghan experience reveals that there is no easy answer to the question of how to use military force in Syria. The United States should not intervene militarily in Syria. The costs and risks are too high for a successful outcome.

Critics may misconstrue this argument as an apologia for the Assad regime. It is not. The tyranny of Assad must end. A transition, however, should not be achieved through a destructive war campaign or a CIA-driven, Afghan-style insurgency. Exiles should be part of a broad coalition of forces, including the opposition, that seeks a peaceful and democratic transition to civilian rule.

Peter Billerbeck is completing his Master’s of Science in Foreign Service at Georgetown University and was awarded a National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations Summer Lebanon Fellowship. All views expressed are his own.

Most Clicked

- [Link to Most Clicked Articles]

Recent Posts

- [Link to Latest Posts]
Syrian Refugees: A Moral and Humanitarian Imperative for the United States

When President Obama is sworn in for a second term this January, his administration will face a multitude of foreign policy challenges. Among them is the crisis in Syria, which has metastasized into a full-blown civil war, which is tragically unlikely to end in the near future. Much attention has rightly been paid to the brutal killings and repression perpetrated by the Assad regime, with a death toll now reaching over 30,000. However, beyond the headlines lies the predicament of the surge of Syrian refugees facing the region.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, upwards of 100,000 Syrians have fled to neighboring Turkey and over 50,000 to both Lebanon and Jordan. Turkey has played a pivotal role in sheltering Syrian refugees, but it has been shown signs of strain over capacity as previously announced limits are reached and exceeded. As the protracted nature of the conflict has become reality and the Assad regime remains entrenched, domestic forces within Turkey are resisting the refugee administration's policies of acceptance. All the while, conditions in camps along the Turkish-Syrian border worsen and Syrians face harsh natural elements, unsanitary conditions and few prospects for economic livelihood or integration in their adopted state.

Neighboring Lebanon faces a significant challenge. While on one hand Syrian fleeing to population centers in Lebanon have been accommodated in established communities among extended families or other support networks, these capacities are nearing their limits. This summer, in interviews I conducted with Lebanese political, academic and social leaders, many expressed concern for a Lebanese state already burdened by over 400,000 Palestinian refugees who have become de facto permanent residents. UNRWA chief, Robert Turner, has warned that the Syrian refugee crisis could bring in over one million people to Lebanon by 2014, a growing concern as Lebanon prepares for another surge in its population.

Some may claim that the nature of Syrian refugees is incomparable with that of stateless Palestinians; however, that action presupposes Syria will be self-sufficient in terms of the needs of refugees. While some have prospered, the hardships of day-to-day economic livelihood remain a struggle for the majority. A visit to the communities of Am el Kheir, Tartus and Homs makes plain this harsh reality of indefinite refugeehood where conditions remain unhealthy, underdeveloped and largely ignored by governmental authorities.

Existing refugee camps in neighboring countries do not devolve into permanent squatter and misery is not only a moral and humanitarian imperative but also an economic imperative as well. The infrastructure and government dependent on these populations collapse more quickly and offer no sustainability.

Therefore, the United States must do more to vigorously support the efforts of aid organizations and neighboring states to shoulder the weight of the Syrian humanitarian crisis. Though the U.S. State Department has pledged and apportioned non-lethal aid to opposition groups operating within Syria as well as existing efforts from other refugee organizations totaling over $1.25 billion in FY 2012, more can and should be done to provide relief to those fleeing the brutal Assad regime. This should not be construed as a call for war—NATO, but rather a call for relief efforts from the State Department, USAID and non-governmental partners organizations to garner a broader mandate and increased resources to assist refugees desperately in need. This means expanding the initial assistance already provided through multilateral organizations in Western Turkey to more remote Turkish border regions, the Bekaa area of Lebanon and northern Jordan.

While calls for aggressive covert action, no-fly zones, militarized safe zones and other metrics are open, we must be wary of such options for the risks they entail. However, we should immediately pursue increased support and humanitarian aid for those Syrians struggling as refugees in neighboring countries.

As we have seen in other cases of brutally drawn civil conflicts, while global powers are exploiting and stratagizing, refugee populations are all too often forgotten and purposely ignored. The examples of Sudan, Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan are only a few of the most recent cases. Syria must not be another.

Peter Billerbeck is completing the Master’s of Science in Foreign Service at Georgetown University and was awarded a National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations Summer Lebanon Fellowship. All views expressed are his own.
Peter Billerbeck (12) introduced speakers at the "Challenges for Lebanon: Beyond the Headlines" on Thursday, October 19. At the hot topic are Faina Miski (LL), Managing Director of Global Policy Advisors, Director of the Lebanon Renaissance Foundation and Al MSFS alumnus, and Abdurrahman Fakhoury (K), Washington Bureau Chief for Al Jazeera.

During the summer of 2012, Peter Billerbeck (12) was selected to take part in the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations (NCUSAR) Summer Lebanon Fellowship. As part of the fellowship, he traveled to Lebanon for, as he describes it, a "direct personal experience: Lebanese culture, society and economics, as well as government priorities, concerns and needs."

In practice, it meant a busy summer for Billerbeck, who says he spent "just under three weeks in Lebanon and visited areas including Beirut, Sbbeh and others. [During this time, he conducted] interviews and met with representatives from all walks of life, including local political and social movement leaders, sports, music and entertainment figures, as well as U.S. Embassy representatives, (all to gain a deeper knowledge of Lebanon's strategic issues as they pertain to Lebanon-U.S. relations and Lebanon's role in regional and world affairs)."

As far as why he decided to participate: "Although I have had experience studying the Arab world, mining in Middle East studies and traveling throughout the region, I didn't know a lot about Lebanon beyond what is talked about in the headlines. I saw this program as a good way to get first hand exposure and then share my knowledge upon returning to Georgetown."

"The experience has been a great supplement to my education at MSFS because now I am able to speak first hand, relating perspectives gained from the fellowship in Lebanon. These issues are especially germane given the ongoing crisis in Syria and spillover effects on Lebanon. MSFS also helped me bring a unique perspective to the trip, where I was able to critically analyze the movements and political dynamics we observed," comments Billerbeck.

Our part of the fellowship is organized events to drive discussion of the issues in Lebanon, which is why Peter arranged and hosted the panel discussion "Challenges for Lebanon: Beyond the Headlines" on Thursday, October 25, which featured two noted Middle East experts: Abdurrahman Fakhoury, Al Jazeera's Washington Bureau Chief, and Firas Malmud, Managing Director of Global Policy Advisors, Director of the Lebanon Renaissance Foundation and Al MSFS alumnus.

"The goal of the panel discussion wants share none of the knowledge I gained from the fellowship and bring two experts in for an interactive discussion on Lebanon with Georgetown students. We were really happy with the turnout, with almost 50 students attending from a number of Georgetown programs including MSFR, MA in Conflict Resolution, MA in Arab Studies, PhD in Government and IRUS. A lively discussion followed the remarks from the panelists and there was palpable enthusiasm for engagement on the topics brought up," says Peter.

And what did students who attended come away with? According to Billerbeck, "people gained a greater understanding of the issues facing Lebanon and [he] hopes this event serves as a springboard for ongoing discussion and engagement. [He] will be continuing to work with NCUSAR on the program and will soon be publishing articles on crucial issues facing the region."

To read more about the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations Summer Lebanon Fellowship, see the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations web site.
Cokeley: Lecture ~ Presentation of Study Visit and Research Findings, The Citadel Military College of South Carolina

“I gave a one hour presentation on my trip to Lebanon and my independent research on refugee camps within the country. I made use of a PowerPoint presentation, as well as provided copies of my research findings to attendees.

“The presentation encouraged a lot of Citadel Cadets to approach me about my Fellowship Year and participation in Model Arab League. They all seemed very interested in study abroad opportunities to Lebanon and the political conflict in the country. Overall, the presentation was a success and prompted cadets to think critically about the U.S. relationship with Lebanon.”

Cokeley: Event ~ “The Lebanon I Dream Of” film viewing, The Citadel Military College of South Carolina

“As part of a speaker series on Youth Movements in the Middle East, I hosted a viewing of the documentary “The Lebanon I Dream Of.” The documentary details the many social problems related to the factionalization of the government and imparted to cadets the understanding that the Middle East is not monolithic, not all like Iraq.

“I felt the program was very successful; multiple cadets approached me following the viewing get information on how they might get involved in a study visit to a Middle Eastern country. Many seemed intellectually curious and asked for assistance on final research projects in courses. The viewing was one of the most effective in spreading my experience in Lebanon to Cadets and Citadel alumni.”
Cokeley: Lecture ~ Fourth Class Cadets, The Citadel Military College of South Carolina

“As an Academic Officer in the Corps of Cadets, I am responsible for mentoring all classes of Cadets with regard to their academic development. I spoke with 20-30 Cadets about my experience in Lebanon to encourage them to travel to the region. Many had a strong interest in foreign policy and seemed very receptive to the lecture.

“Many of the Cadets had never considered traveling to Lebanon, nor did they even know where it was. After hearing about the refugee camps, civil war, culture, and politics, they were instantly captivated. I gave a brief summary of the political situation and reviewed some of the conversations we had with speakers in Lebanon. I also recommended further reading to many of the Cadets. They seemed extremely interested as future officers in the U.S. Military.”

Cokeley: Lecture ~ Society of Citadel Libertarians, The Citadel Military College of South Carolina

“I spoke with members of the Society of Citadel Libertarians on the issue of interventionism vs. isolationism, particularly as it relates to U.S. policy toward Lebanon. I spoke on the topic of the Lebanese Civil War and the Beirut bombings that killed a graduate of The Citadel as well as hundreds of U.S. Marines.

“I felt program was very successful as multiple Cadets approached me following the lecture regarding their participation in a study visit to a Middle Eastern country. Many seemed intellectually curious and asked for assistance on final research projects in courses. Applying interventionism vs. isolationism to a real-world situation helped Cadets better understand the pros and cons of interventionism in the Arab/Mediterranean world.”

Cokeley: Lecture ~ Heritage Foundation Intern Cohort, Washington, DC

“I gave a small presentation to a number of Heritage Foundation interns and staff at their Washington, DC headquarters regarding my study visit to Lebanon and what I learned. I summarized the political situation and my visit there itself. I spoke directly with former U.S. Attorney General Edwin Meese about the experience.

“The Heritage Foundation is a very conservative force; therefore, it attracts very conservative, largely pro-Israel interns. Giving these interns an alternative perspective as to the 2006 war and Palestinian refugee camps seemed to open their minds to other avenues of thought.”
"As part of the Donor Dinner, I gave a 20 minute speech and attendant slide show on the importance of programs that explored Middle East-U.S. relations. In particular, I focused on the impact that my Fellowship in Lebanon had on both my perspective of the 'Middle East Monolith Myth' and the media narrative on what the people of both Lebanon and Egypt.

"I believe that the most important element I have been able to address, in terms of American perspective, is the 'Middle East Monolith Myth.' Each country, and even region within each country, has its own culture, history and perspective of its place in the global family. Lebanon, in particular, is not the war-torn nation that is often pictured, but a rebuilding nation and economy."

"I gave a short lecture on Lebanon in the modern day as part of a speaker series at my university. The focus of the presentation was the difference between the way that Lebanon is perceived by Americans and a more accurate portrayal based on perspective on the ground. I also discussed the effort of NCUSAR and the Lebanon Renaissance Foundation in building bridges for peaceful dialogue.

"I felt the smaller audience at this lecture allowed for a more intimate discussion on the reality of life in Lebanon, as well as the Palestinian people largely relegated to 'camps' in Lebanon. One individual in the group was a current U.S. military service member, and it opened his mind to the perspective that the 'Middle East Monolith Myth' was a media construct."

"I am honored to have been selected by the council and the Lebanon Renaissance Foundation for participation in the visit," said Garcia. "I firmly believe that exchange and dialogue programs such as this, support the core of what the UH-Clear Lake Cross-Cultural Studies Program and the Model Arab League are about. I anticipate that my experience with the program will help me to develop a better understanding of the rich culture of Lebanon.

"Their participation was made possible through my work with the UH-Clear Lake Model Arab League Student Organization and a generous recommendation from Assistant Professor in Anthropology and Cross-Cultural Studies Maxie Curtis.

Upon his return, Juan will spend a year working with the council, Model Arab League Student Organization and the Lebanon Renaissance Foundation to share his experiences in Lebanon with the Bay Area and Houston communities. ***"

“My travel blog, on which I posted both during and since the study visit, received a high level of hits. It was linked to a short article reported in Virginia Tech’s “News2Note” publication from the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, which is sent to the entire college. It was also posted on my department’s website, which did cause a spike in traffic to my blog. These blog entries have spawned conversations on Twitter, interesting with many Lebanese expatriates in Australia who asked me questions about electoral fraud and the upcoming 2013 elections. I actually convinced one individual to register to vote from overseas!”

Excerpt from Blog:

Day 10+ (July 2-3) – Princesses, LAU, Shatilla, Le Pché, Flight

For those of you still following my trip blog, I do apologize for the delay. There is just such a finality to writing this post, and I honestly haven’t wanted to deal with it. While my post-fellowship plan includes extensive blogging of my trip research, this is really the last “Today we did X” kind of post, and it really does end the trip in some ways.

Originally planned for our last day in Beirut was a wrap-up session with the LRF and a farewell dinner at Le Pché. Through some discussion of our goals and some amazing flexibility on the part of the LRF, we were able to have several extra meetings, including meeting with Druze Princess Hayat Anlau, one of the coolest women I’ve ever met. Anlau met with us at her home in Aley, a beautiful mansion overlooking Beirut. It looks a little something like this:

Anlau and her two daughters spent about an hour and a half with us, discussing women’s place in politics in Lebanon. Currently, there are only four women in Parliament, which Anlau sees as a huge problem for equality. She proposes a quota system requiring a minimum of 50 women in Parliament at any given time. Without the quotas, she argues, women will never have the

Holly Jordan

Jordan LaFountain: Lecture Series

Lecture ~ Seminar on International Studies course, Virginia Tech.

Lecture ~ Judaism Christianity and Islam course, Virginia Tech.

Lecture ~ ASPECT Program Research Methods course, Virginia Tech.

Lecture ~ ASPECT Program Global Governance course, Virginia Tech

Lecture ~ Introduction to Politics course, Radford University

Jordan LaFountain: Online Mention ~ “College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences News2Note,” Virginia Tech.

“Both the structure of the program itself as well as the caliber of students chosen to attend made the program itself exceptionally successful in terms of preparing us to discuss key issues of Lebanese politics and society. I still use my notes from the trip on a weekly basis both in my own research and in preparing lectures for my courses.”
Aug. 23, 2012 – Holly Jordan, a second year Ph.D. student in ASPECT focusing on political and cultural theory, returned from a ten day study visit to Lebanon on July 3. Jordan was chosen from a pool of approximately 80 candidates for the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations “Lebanon Summer Fellowship.” The goal of the study visit was to gain firsthand knowledge of Lebanese and Lebanese-American policies.

As part of the in-country portion of her fellowship, Jordan met with leaders in the country including social activist groups, cultural leaders, and members of political parties (including current and former Members of Parliament). With each group, she discussed the position of Lebanon within the greater Middle East and the ongoing relationship between Lebanon and the United States. Based out of Beirut, her ten day trip also included visits to major cultural sites, including Saatbek, Bsharri, the Chouf, and the Jeita Grotto.

In the coming year, Jordan will share her experience in Lebanon through a series of lectures and seminars as well as reflective essays on her blog. To follow her trip and fellowship year, please visit her website: http://hollyjordan.net/category/2012/.
Laura Kisthardt will spend 10 days this summer studying in Lebanon as part of a National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations program.

Kisthardt, a member of Western Reserve Academy’s Class of 2009, is one of 10 students selected nationwide to participate in the program. Kisthardt is currently a junior at John Carroll University, where she is studying political science.

She is eligible for the Lebanon trip because of her work with John Carroll’s Model Arab League, a program where students learn about the politics and history of the Arab world as well as diplomacy and public speaking. In February, Kisthardt competed as a member of John Carroll’s delegation to the Ohio Valley Model Arab League, held at Miami University.

The John Carroll team earned an honorable mention award for its representation of Lebanon.

Kisthardt was nominated for the travel award by Professor Maria DelRio, who teaches political science at John Carroll and serves as faculty advisor to the school’s Model Arab League team. Kisthardt then completed an application detailing how she would promote U.S.-Arab relations and share her experiences with John Carroll students. She plans to maintain a blog during her trip and lead information sessions on campus next academic year.

Founded in 1983, the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations is a non-profit, non-governmental, educational organization dedicated to improving American knowledge and understanding of the Arab world.
Arts & Sciences students chosen for international honors

Two students from John Carroll University’s College of Arts and Sciences have been selected for prestigious international experiences: Jacqueline Wyman ‘12 leaves in July for a year in Germany, and Laura Kisthardt ‘13 leaves in June for 10 days in Lebanon.

Wyman, from North Lima, Ohio, will participate in the 2012-13 Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange for Young Professionals, a prestigious yearlong fellowship to study and work in Germany.

A sociology major with a minor in foreign affairs, Wyman will complete a three-month, intensive German language course, study at a German university for four months, and work as an intern with a German company for five months. She is exploring options for her future placements in Germany, with plans to gain experience in international aid and development policy work.

The Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange is a federally funded program supported by the U.S. Congress and Germany’s national parliament, the Bundestag. The exchange is reciprocal, with 75 German and 75 American citizens participating each year.

Kisthardt has been selected by the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations (NCUSAR) to participate in an all-expenses-paid cultural immersion trip to Lebanon. The political science major from Hudson, Ohio, is one of only 16 students in the nation to receive the honor.

Nominees for the NCUSAR travel award participate in Model Arab League, a program in which students learn about the politics and history of the Arab world, as well as diplomacy and public speaking. In February, Kisthardt competed as part of John Carroll’s delegation to the Ohio Valley Model Arab League, held at Walsh University. The JCU team earned an honorable mention award for its representation of Lebanon, and six John Carroll students won individual honors.

Kisthardt plans to blog during her trip and lead information sessions on campus during the 2012-2013 academic year.
Kisthardt: Article ~ “Exploring Lebanon,” Hudson Weekly

“I met with the Editor of Record Publishing, Stephanie Fellenstien. She interviewed me and then wrote an article for Hudson Monthly Magazine about my experience with the Lebanon study visit.

“I feel the article was very successful in reaching a wide range of audiences and educating them on my experience in Lebanon. The article was not dense or full of facts, but it made the simple point that there are Americans who have had positive experiences in the Middle East. Many people have come up to me after they read the article and said that they were interested in finding out more about my experience.”
The trip was a whirlwind of activity—a mix of Middle East history, current policy lessons and trips to see some amazing sights. Kirshner says.

During a walking tour of Beirut, the group visited two churches and a mosque. "I had never been in a mosque before," Kirshner wrote on her blog. "The men in our group were able to walk right into the mosque and look around. The women, however, had to put on black veils and wear long, black dresses, which were all provided by the mosque."

"Kirshner said she was surprised how much freedom was possible.

"I didn't expect that. Most people were told to go to Israel and not to go to Lebanon, and now it's different."

One of her favorite sights was the Roman ruins at Baalbek.

"You could see the ruins with Rome or Greece," she says. "These were the same ruins the Romans built in the temple."

"It was a very interesting experience," she adds, "to see how the past and present coexist in Lebanon."

The trip was planned to be six days, but due to delays, it was extended to seven days.

And as a result of current events, the trip was shortened to five days.

"I think it is important to be aware of current events," Kirshner says. "It helps to understand the complexity of the situation."
Kisthardt: Article ~ “JCU Student Spends Part of Summer in Lebanon,” The Carroll News

“I was interviewed by a student reporter for an article in the Carroll News, the student paper on campus at John Carroll University.

“I felt that the article did a good job explaining my Fellowship and giving information about the study visit in Lebanon. The article included a link to my blog, which I’ve made my goal for winter break to post more regularly.”
**Kisthardt: Lecture ~ Middle East History course, Western Reserve Academy**

“I gave a presentation about what I learned while in Lebanon for a Middle East History class at the high school I attended. The students had many questions and were very engaged in the presentation.

“This program was very successful. Even though the audience was smaller than my normal presentations, I feel it was extremely beneficial to the students to allow them to ask so many questions and go in-depth on topics in which they were interested.”

**Kisthardt: Lecture ~ Post-Conflict Resolution course, John Carroll University**

“I gave a presentation to Dr. Metres’ class, Post-Conflict Resolution, which focused on Northern Ireland and Palestine. My presentation was about my study visit and also focused on independent research I did on the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

“The students were just beginning to learn about Palestine, so my presentation about the Palestinian refugees was very engaging and provided new information to them. Many students stayed after the class was over to discuss topics further with me. Several students expressed a sincere interest in Model Arab League, as well.”

**Kisthardt: Lecture ~ Arabic 201 course, John Carroll University**

“I presented to my Arabic 201 class for over an hour about my study visit to Lebanon and about my research on the Palestinian refugees there.

“This was my most exciting presentation so far because I was given the whole class time instead of only 15-30 minutes. My Arabic class was obviously interested in the Middle East. They asked many questions and were very engaged. Many students commented that they learned a lot about Lebanon, and admitted that they hadn’t known anything about the country before.”

**Kisthardt: Lecture ~ US Foreign Policy in the Middle East course, John Carroll University**

“I presented for 30 minutes to Prof. Debaz’ class, US Foreign Policy in the Middle East. There were about 20 students in the class. I shared information with them about my study visit, the Fellowship Year and how to get involved with the Model Arab League.

“I feel this presentation was very successful in fulfilling the mission of the Fellowship Year because these students are already interested in the Middle East, but I gave them a personal perspective from a student which was probably easier for them to relate to. My goal during my presentation was to dispel many common misconceptions about the Middle East. Several students asked good questions, showing their interest in the subject.”
Kisthardt: Lecture ~ Hudson Library and Historical Society, Hudson, OH

“I set up a formal presentation through the Hudson Library and Historical Society. They managed all of the promotion; there was an article in three local newspapers a few days before the event. I also asked many members of my church to attend.

“I feel this program was very successful. I was pleasantly surprised by the fact that people I did not know at all attended this presentation. The question-and-answer portion at the end of the presentation was quite long, showing that people were very interested in the subject.”

Kisthardt: Lecture ~ Campus Presentation, collaboration with Middle East Student Association, John Carroll University

“With the help of the Middle East Student Association, I hosted an open forum and presentation on my Fellowship and what I learned in Lebanon. This presentation was an hour long, including a question-and-answer section at the end.

“I feel this program was very successful. I promoted the presentation very well and had a mix of current students, alumni and members of the community. Many of my friends commented that they had never learned so much about the Middle East as from my presentation.”

Kisthardt: Lecture ~ French Club, Western Reserve Academy

“I contacted one of my high school teachers and set up a presentation for the French Club there. Since Lebanon is so influenced by French language and culture, I tailored my presentation to this audience.

“I feel this program was very successful because it reached a different audience. These high school students had no idea what the National Council or LRF was, and many did not know much about the Middle East. Hopefully these students will now be interested in participating in a Model Arab League when they go to college!”
McMahan: Blog ~ Head First Adventures

“This blog consists of a series of posts which were blogged daily during my study visit to Lebanon. The posts are my personal stories interwoven with historical and cultural information. The blog page includes a photo album/video section, and a link of my Honors Senior Thesis, which I wrote based on what we learned from our research in the region.

“I don’t think that this blog has gotten out to as many people as I had hoped, but fortunately it is a permanent part of the internet, allowing infinite opportunities for additional viewers to discover my site. Our Fellowship group’s collective blog where my blog was re-posted, however, has received a great deal of hits.”

Excerpt from Blog:
**McMahan: Lecture ~ Arab Culture course (in Arabic), Grand Valley State University**

“I gave a presentation for a course on Arab Culture at Grand Valley. I used a PowerPoint presentation to help tell the story of our study visit, but shortened it from 10 days to 3 for simplicity’s sake. The presentation was about 15 minutes long with pictures and videos, and was presented in Arabic, not English. Before the presentation, I also handed around a copy of Khalil Gibran’s *The Prophet*, the Lebanon history book we were given, and some fairy tales I picked up in Arabic while in Lebanon.

“I tried to keep this presentation short and engaging, but extremely informative. Contrary to most study abroad presentations, this presentation deeply incorporated government, economic, and historical facts into the presentation. It was followed by a short question-and-answer period and seemed to educate the students a great deal.”

**McMahan: Lecture Series**

**Lecture ~ “Civil Conflicts in Africa” course, Grand Valley State University**

**Lecture ~ Islamic Middle East Honors course, Grand Valley State University**

**Lecture ~ Liberal Arts 100 course, Grand Valley State University**

**Lecture ~ International House Living Center, Grand Valley State University**

**McMahan: Lecture ~ Arabic Language Program Participants, Oman**

“This presentation went along with an assignment for my Arabic language program in Oman, in which I presented a brief history of Lebanon and then talked about its current economic and political conditions. The presentation was complete with a slideshow of pictures from the study visit.

“Even though I didn’t reach out to many people through this particular program, my audience consisted of students who are most likely to hold an interest in Lebanon and consider going there in the future. In fact, many of my colleagues approached me later to say that they were interested in visiting or studying in Lebanon as a result of my presentation.”

**McMahan: Cultural Event ~ JayCees June Meeting and Picnic, Farmington, MI**

“I brought homemade baklava to the Farmington Area JayCee June meeting as my dish for our picnic potluck. I also printed out half-sheets with the baklava recipe on one side and basic information about Lebanon on the other, which I passed out. After talking a little bit about why I went to Lebanon and my experiences there, I answered a few questions from my JayCee colleagues, mostly about the sectarianism in Lebanon.

“I had an audience that was engaged in my talk and asked good questions. Hopefully my flyers were helpful, too, because people could hold on to the baklava recipes forever (with the Lebanon information on the back).”
McMahan: Article ~ “White Lake Resident Receives 1 of 10 Fellowships for Travel to Lebanon,” Spinal Column Newspaper

“I believe that this article was a great way to educate a lot of people (28,227 household circulation) in my area whom I might have otherwise not been able to reach. The article was short and sweet, so I think people took the time to read it, and there was a balance of personal focus on me and educational focus on Lebanon and the Arab world.”
Nixon: Online Mention – “Honors Student to Study in Lebanon this Summer” Bloomsburg University News
The "Near-East" Awaits

I had always expected my first venture into another country would be to Canada, only a brief trip by car to the North. To my delight, I am now preparing to spend ten days far across the sea in the Republic of Lebanon, an intensive learning experience that will take me across three countries.

It was during my sophomore year that the seeds of this trip were planted. I was already a history major, but I was planning to specialize in the history of the Middle East even then. No other area of the world has fascinated me so much with its history; in many ways history could be said to have started in the countries that now exist there, dating back to the dawn of civilization and stretching across the ages to reach into the present day.

Studying that story is one of my passions, and I dreamed of seeing that land myself some day, although I thought that this would have to be sometime in the distant future.

However, I was determined to make the effort, and so taking the offered course in Arabic was an opportunity that I couldn’t pass up. It was during my studies there that Nawal Ronnies, my Arabic instructor, not only taught me the language but pushed me to become involved in the RJJ Arabic Club and in the 2011 Model Arab League (MAL).

Model Arab League Influence

The MAL proved to be an exciting and in-depth way of immersing myself in the politics and history of the Arab nations of the Middle East, and I loved the experience. The next year, I found myself to be Bloomsburg University’s lead delegate at the 2012 Model, which I found even more exciting. Throughout that time, I was advised and aided by Professor Bonomo, who always pushed me to provide my best to the MAL and to my studies.

The Model Arab League was founded by the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations (NCUSAR), an organization which is dedicated to the promotion of knowledge about the Arab world. After my return from the 2012 Model, NCUSAR sent me a message inviting Professor Bonomo asking him if he had any nominations for students to participate in an expense paid, 10 cultural immersion trip to the Republic of Lebanon. At first urging, and with no small amount of hopeful eagerness, I applied.

The result is that the distant future has become an immediate reality. Lebanon awaits me.

The program is not a university course, but is nonetheless intense. The NCUSAR coordinators, in conjunction with the Lebanese Renaissance Foundation, have ensured that our itinerary will be packed with everything from trips to ancient sites from history, to cedar forests and ancient cities, to museums and meetings with important figures to discuss everything from politics to business to the press.

It is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, not comparable to anyone studying the Middle East.

This, of course, not even mentioning the thrill of being in another country and experiencing the new sights and smells, hearing the language, and walking upon ground that resonates with an ancient past. There is so much to anticipate that I cannot begin to list all.

For now, Masalam.

— Robby Nixon, junior history major
Article ~ “Beirut: The Living City,”

Beirut: The Living City

After a long flight from Washington D.C. to Istanbul, and then a much shorter flight from Istanbul to Beirut, I found myself taking my first steps onto the soil of Lebanon. Night had fallen, but there were new things to see in every direction. Windy streets lit by signs and headlights, stands selling fruit, pastrami in many different sizes of newsstands and stores. Names in Arabic, French, and English. I went to bed thinking that things would seem more calm in the light of day.

My first full day in Lebanon proved that thinking completely wrong. My first impression of Beirut is best described as a city that is very much alive, ancient and yet growing, a city of complimentary contrasts.

After meeting our guide from the Lebanese Renaissance Foundation (LRF), our group took a tour of the city’s downtown. The walk provided a wonderful overview of how Beirut is, to me, a place of living history. The ancient remains of Roman bath houses, their ruins newly excavated, lie beneath the imposing architecture of old Ottoman offices and government buildings. The oldest functioning Greek Orthodox church in Beirut, the Cathedral of St. George built in the 18th century, stands nearby the buildings constructed during the rule of the French mandate after WWI.

And everywhere are the small remnants of the Civil War, the holes in old buildings and now-fractured statues. Construction is booming, with buildings rising up all over the city and signs advertising where new locations will be. If this combines to create an atmosphere of energy that hangs over the memories of the past, a sense of a society moving forward.

The Living City

The multi-faith nature of Lebanon was also clearly felt during my walk through Beirut’s downtown. The minarets and dome of the 21st century mosque inside next to the tall tower, still under construction, of a Maronite Catholic church. The Cathedral of St. George lies within earshot of a mosque call-to-prayer.

Seeing these religious buildings standing serene within a short distance of one another was almost enough to make one forget that Lebanon is a nation divided by religious groups, to the point that the government itself requires strict fixed positions and seats based on religious identity.

But the city did not give me the impression of a tense or divided place. Entirely the opposite. People on the streets walk casually in both “Western” dress and in slightly more religious attire, with clear preference for clothing of color and style. The soldiers and guards in their camouflage and casually held rifles were imposing at first, but their constant presence and helpful dispositions soon put them in mind of police more than warriors, with some stopping to chat with passing friends or occasionally helping to direct the hectic and all-but-lawless Beirut traffic. Arabic is the most common language, but I was more than able to get by with English and the semi-popular French to supplement my meager Arabic skills.

My first day ended with a meal of traditional-style falafel, which was perfect for my palate, and an unexpected pleasure. An open-air music concert, what was apparently an annual event, was playing in the evening, and I was surprised to find that I recognized the voice of the singer. It was Nahwa Karam, the famous Lebanese singer and, it so happened, one of my personal favorites artists.

During my first year in the Arabic Club, we had danced to one of her songs at the International Festival. I couldn’t believe my luck at finding myself at a free concert of my favorite Lebanese singer, and the crowd of energetic, dancing and clapping people contained all age groups and styles. It was an exciting and moving moment, and the perfect ending to my first night in Lebanon.

It is hard to believe that nine days still lie ahead on this trip, but the LRF has created a schedule just as full and exciting as this first day. I can’t wait what awaits me aside from the general itinerary, but today fills me with even more excitement for what is to come.

Until their readers, M. Salama

— Robby Nixon, a junior history major
The Study Begins - A Journey and Meetings

After our day of coming across the city, the course of the program began in earnest. We saw most of the country's heart, and we began to see a system of meetings with important figures from many aspects of Lebanon's society.

My journey into the heart of Lebanon began with a tour of the northern area, crossing the mountains into the Bekaa Valley before returning to Beirut. The journey from Beirut began by ascending to the north of the Bekaa Valley. The coast is well developed, with the outlines of buildings rising against the blue of the Mediterranean Sea. There was some tension in these places, passing a few checkpoints, but there was a normal occurrence that I soon became accustomed to. Some of us seemed more reinforced to enter the cities, some were not.

Vestiges of the Bekaa mountain range

The landscape began changing dramatically as the elevation increased, giving way to steep mountain sides which the two winding passes bordered by a stunning view of deep, lightly forested canyons. Once these mountains had been dominated by forests of cedar, but now they are mostly stopped with trees of small trees clinging to their sides. Numerous towns and villages folklore the road into the mountains, the heart of Lebanon country and featuring prominent churches and buildings usually constructed of stone.

The towns seemed to cling to the sides of the mountains, often with petros overtopping the steep valley. This landscape remained largely unchanged as we reached Bcharre, the nesting place of the famous Lebanese writer and artist Khalil Gibran.

Gibran's home is tucked quietly into a mountainous area overlooking the valley below, which Bcharre meant. It was once a home, and it still feels as though it has been going from the artist's life. The artist's house is said to be the first, and it was only after the war where it was tuck into the side of the mountain, and beside which he left a message in Arabic, French, and English for future prosperity. It was a reflective and solemn experience.

Next we headed further up the mountains, and the elevation increased sharply. The peace trees were seen disappearing completely, not at all suggesting our next point of destination: the Cedar Forest. The forest is the site of its kind in Lebanon, the centuries-old trees untouched by a 3000-year-old drought for their wood. A winding trail led through the massive and twisted trunks, and the atmosphere was very serene and peaceful.

Finally we reached the crest of the mountain, where hikers seem to circle around the peaks, and the view of the valley below was breathtaking. The view of the valley from the summit was breathtaking. The view of the valley from the summit was breathtaking. The view of the valley from the summit was breathtaking.

The next day began the main meetings that took place throughout the trip. We first met with three independent Lebanese journalists: Michael Young, Hayat Shablar, and Ismail Slim, who shared their insights into the complex Lebanese political system, the problem of the effects of voluntary amnesty about the Civil War or the youth, and the nature of the free press on the country that is so politically charged. We also met with the head of the Lebanese Business Association, from whom we learned that in the face of an economic completely inactive government the Lebanese have turned increasingly to the private sector and NGOs to get the actual work of the country done.

Everyone that we have met in Lebanon has had similar stories to tell. Although Lebanon has been referred to as one of the world's most developed in the last 100 years, its political system, by which Parliament and key positions are determined by religious affiliation, have gridlocked the government. This has, frequent analysis, and the question of the Federation's place have left the infrastructure lacking to the point that blockouts are commonplace even in Beirut. In response, the Tunisian prime minister asked the minister to fill the gap, to restore the government's role. The question of the decentralization of NGOs, traditional, small movements like the Lebanese Revolution Movement, were attempting to stop the current legislative system and institute a more open, merit-based election system.

Overall, the visit so far has been an intense and in-depth look at Lebanon as a whole. Our days were marked by a tight schedule, but sometimes unfortunately, must be kept close if everything is to get done in time. But the experience is invaluable and we have enjoyed nothing but the best hospitality from both our hosts at the UPE and by the Lebanese who we have met both formally and on the street.

The highlight point has been reached, but it doesn’t quite feel like it. More official meetings and a journey to the south still lie ahead.

Until then, I am adhering to the phrase of the day: “Yalla,” meaning “Let’s keep moving!”
— Robele Kinoti, a junior history major.
Nixon: Article ~ “BU Student Attends School Program to Lebanon,” The Voice Student Newspaper, Bloomsburg University

BU Student Attends School Program to Lebanon

By: Vanessa Pellechio, Editor-in-Chief

BU student Robert Nixon went on an all-expense-paid trip to Beirut, Lebanon last summer for 10 days. This was Nixon’s first time traveling to the Middle East.

“I have resolved to go back in the future,” said the senior history major.

Nixon went through the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations to go on this trip and was provided funding from the university as well.

On the second night, Nixon was able to see a free concert outside an Beirut. The person singing was Najwa Karam, who Nixon was a fan of before the trip.

“An man in the crowd noticed my excitement, and leaned it to say ‘Najwa Karam number one!’ and I enthusiastically agreed,” Nixon continued.

The trip to Lebanon encompassed going the Lebanon Mountains, going through the Bekaa Valley to visit Baalbek and spending most of the time in the capital.

When Nixon was in Beirut, he was surprised with how English was more understood than French.

“Arabic was the most commonly spoken and written language, but knowing a few basic phrases combined with English went a long way,” said Nixon.

Nixon went to Lebanon when there was some trouble in Tripoli, but the tour guides had the students avoid that area for protection.

“At that time things in the country were still fairly calm. The Syrian crisis was ongoing of course, reports about it dominated the Lebanese news while I was there, but the fighting was still mostly contained in Syria,” Nixon shared.

Nixon believes the best part came in two parts. Since this was his first trip outside the country, it was a whole new experience for him.

“The differences and the similarities in the nights, sounds, smells, culture, and people provided me with a new worldview almost overnight,” Nixon said.

Nixon also enjoyed how the program gave such a comprehensive view of Lebanon in a short time. He met government officials, business leaders, policymakers and media sources.

“So, in a way, the best part of the experience was the experience itself,” Nixon continued.

Nixon was able to emphasize when gaining a better understanding of the country’s problems.

“I learned about the problems that it faces, the things that the Lebanese want to achieve and what they have already done. I got to experience a different culture and see not only the differences from my own but also the similarities, and I learned from both of them,” Nixon shared.

Nixon encourages students to travel overseas because it provides a chance to understand the world in a whole different way.

“We aren’t living in a constrained world any more, we are living in a global society,” said Nixon.
Ring: Online Mention ~ “Student Travels to Lebanon for Fellowship on U.S.-Arab Relations,” External Relations Department, Centenary College of Louisiana

Ring: Lecture ~ Church, Shreveport, LA
For several moments my only thought was that could have been me. I could have been one among the dead that day. Fortunately, however, I was only reading reports of the car bombing in the Ashrafieh district in Beirut. Three months before I was staying at the Hotel Alexander just meters from where the explosion took place as part of a ten days study visit to Lebanon. My experience reading the news reports and watching the video film from the aftermath was completely unnerving. Living in our highly militarized world, I have seen numerous footage reels of physical and human destruction. But watching the footage from neighborhoods I recognized, from streets I travelled down, caused an emotional reaction to the violence unlike anything I have experienced before. Part of what made the experience so overwhelming is that for me traveling causes you to create a special connection to the people and places you meet. Part of your heart becomes attached to them so that you experience such devastation with them. You share in their sense of loss.

Despite the feelings I could have fallen victim to the attack, I would not trade my opportunity to travel which was made possible by the Summer Fellowship Program with the National Council on U.S. Arab-Relations (NCUSAR). I became affiliated with the NCUSAR through my participation in Centenary’s Model Arab League. Each year our delegation participates in Southwest Model Arab League (MAL) conference to be hosted this year at Texas A&M-Commerce.

Model Arab League is a simulated exercise that allows participating delegates to role-play as representatives of member state interests on various councils. Our delegates self-select into council assignments that range anywhere from social and political affairs to joint defense to economics. Council assignments allow delegates to narrow their research to specific topics within the purview of their council. The goal is to help our delegates develop a clearer understanding of the regional issues Arab League faces as well as to help our delegation create a more nuanced understanding of our state’s position on these key issues.

It is NCUSAR’s objective to help students of any academic background create a more holistic understanding of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in order to overcome many of the perceptions of the region. Fully committed to these objectives, the NCUSAR regularly sponsors students on study visits to countries throughout MENA with all expenses paid. Participants in MAL also have access to intensive language programs hosted abroad as well as unique internship opportunities in D.C.

Therefore if you are interested in the MENA region, interested in travelling with all expenses paid, or interning in D.C., check out Centenary’s Model Arab League and see how you can get involved. You never know where your experience with MAL may lead you. But where ever it takes you, you will be able see the world in a new light.
Increase world’s sense of community

My thoughts and prayers are with the people of Lebanon after a car bomb exploded during rush hour traffic near Sassine Square in the Ashrafiyeh district of central Beirut.

I was very unnerved by reading this news report because I was staying in the Ashrafiyeh district just three months ago as a participating fellow in the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations’ Lebanese Summer Fellowship Program. There were several moments where my only thought was that could have been me. This overwhelming feeling however will not discourage me from continuing my travels; where ever they may lead. In fact, I am even more convicted about the importance of world traveling.

Living in our highly militarized world, I have seen numerous footage reels of physical and human destruction. But my experience watching the footage from neighborhoods I recognized, from streets I traveled down, caused an emotional reaction to the violence unlike anything I have experienced before. Travelling causes you to develop a connection to the people and the places. They become a part of your life story, however marginally so. Those intertwined paths cause you to experience such devastation with them. You share in their sense of loss. Your reputation to violence is experienced at a level never felt before.

I encourage people to continue travelling, to continue interwining our stories, to increase our sense of common humanity. Perhaps maybe then we can come to know sustainable peace.

- Jordan Ring
Shreveport
Ring: Program ~ “Beirut to Shreveport through a Democratic Lens” Photograph Exhibition Project

“The exhibition ‘Beirut to Shreveport thru a Democratic Lens’ is a documentary photo exhibition that developed out of a ten day study-visit to Lebanon by Centenary political science major Jordan Ring. Ring traveled to Lebanon with the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations and the Lebanon Renaissance Foundation to gain a deeper understanding of the region and its politics. In a discussion with a native Lebanese person, Ring remembers being cautioned ‘If you understand Lebanon’s history, that’s because no one explained it to you.’ To make sense of the centuries-long history of the region’s various identities and competing interests is a monumental task. Ring developed the ‘Beirut to Shreveport’ project to help create meaning of these effects in the present day and purposefully initiate a cross-cultural understanding of what democracy means.

“‘Beirut to Shreveport thru a Democratic Lens’ explores how Lebanese and American students define democracy. To begin the exploration process, Ring partnered with photography students from American Community School in Beirut and Centenary College of Louisiana in Shreveport. She asked individuals in both groups to create photographic images that they perceived to represent democracy in their everyday lives. Six themes guided the students’ photographic process: work, religion, participation, expression, commerce, and ‘myself’. The result is an exhibition that juxtaposes images by Lebanese and American students to create an effective interplay of various interpretations of ‘democracy.’

“Throughout the exhibition, Ring intentionally grouped images together to mirror the six themes that originally guided students’ interpretation of democracy. However, interpretation of the students’ photographs is left open viewer. Opinion sheets provided by Ring at the gallery’s entrance allow viewers to anonymously share their interpretation of students’ images. Viewers are encouraged to fill out an opinion sheet which will broaden the dialogue initiated by the Shreveport to Beirut Project and create interactive engagement with the ideas of democracy. All completed opinion sheets will become a part of the history of the exhibition.”
Xharda: Lecture ~ Drop-on-Stone (DoSO) Student Organization, Northeastern University

“DoSO is a student group at Northeastern University that focuses on human security issues around the globe. This semester we are specifically working on alleviating some of the suffering for refugees fleeing the Syrian conflict. Because of Lebanon’s proximity to the conflict, I decided to create a presentation for the group during one of our weekly meetings. It focused on historical ties between Lebanon and Syria, how the conflict had impacted Lebanon, and how Lebanon can be of aid to the refugees leaving the country.

“Our discussion during the evening was extremely fruitful in bringing about general knowledge and misconceptions of the regions. It got people thinking of how other Arab nations can help resolve the issue in Syria and how Lebanon, specifically, can aid in this roles because of historic ties.”

Xharda: Lecture ~ Greek Orthodox Youth Association, St. Vasilios Greek Orthodox Church

“GOYA is the Greek Orthodox Youth Association. It brings together young people of the Greek Orthodox Faith. I hosted an event in coordination with my local church to discuss the role of religion in Lebanon and the Middle East. The presentation focused on Lebanon’s confessional system and the influence that Greek Orthodox has had within the country.

“Since many of my discussions about Lebanon had revolved around regional politics in the Middle East, it was nice to focus exclusively on Lebanon and its religious tendencies. The discussion turned out very well, and it made people realize that their religion was just as embedded in Lebanese society as other religions.”

Xharda: Lecture ~ Mock Trial courses (3), Peabody Veterans Memorial High School

“Peabody High School is where I attended high school. I scheduled an event with a history teacher of mine, and I was lucky enough to speak with three of her Mock Trial classes about Lebanese society, politics, and law. Since many of the students who take this class enjoy history, it provided a forum for a productive discussion to break down some commonly held beliefs about being Muslim.

“High School students can be some of the largest critics of international politics. They have many opinions that they are not afraid to express. This was the case while learning about Lebanon. I was glad to be able to remove some of the stigma with which they treated the Middle East and Islam.”
“When I was in high school, I was part of the National Honor Society, a group of students who are deemed to be at the top of their class and show initiative in doing good for the community. I spoke to this year’s National Honor Society about my experiences in Lebanon and answered some of their questions and concerns about the country and the region as a whole.

“The group of students that I spoke to were all very bright and genuinely interested in learning more about Lebanon and anything they could do to spread the word in the community. I gave them the knowledge tools to continue spreading the word. It was a successful event that I believe will continue to have positive ramifications on those students and the high school.”

~ RESULTS ~

TOTAL NUMBER OF AMERICANS IMPACTED

41,700

AMERICANS REACHED DIRECTLY FACE-TO-FACE

1,293