

## Advising Newsletter

July-September 2010

### Crossing the Atlantic: Building Bridges of Understanding

By Hala Al-Hawary, Senior Educational Coordinator

In the fall 2005 I attended a one-month training in the United States for educational advisors. Being a first time visitor, I observed several things during my trip, such as people's gestures, the internal cultures of each state that no one would realize but those who come from a foreign country, table manners, local food differences, local dialects, and even weather changes. Before this trip, I had only seen the U.S. in the movies. This training allowed me to see this country in real life and to visit multiple locations - Washington, D.C., New Jersey, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Colorado.

Early on my trip, I was taken aback by one simple gesture – a complete stranger greeted me with, “Good morning Ma’am.” At first I asked myself, “Hmm...does this person know me?” I then realized that there were pleasant people around me, which made me feel positive about my new surroundings. I realized that I'm in the United States and that is how people greet each other. They do not necessarily need to know you in order to say hello. This helped me to change one stereotype that I had, which was that people might be unfriendly to outsiders.

Though I was only in the U.S. for one month, I had the chance to interact with students and to live the life of a student. I faced many of the things that any international student might deal with when they first arrive, such as trying to do your laundry. I, along with my fellow advisers, spent a good three hours trying to figure out how to use a washing machine, as its controls differed from the ones I am used to. Eventually, we decided to ask the reception desk of the motel we stayed at in Fargo, North Dakota and they helped us out. I faced similar issues using the bathrooms in the U.S. I found that the toilets and the faucets worked differently there. I learned many practical lessons during this trip and I share them with Egyptian students during the Pre-departure Orientations at AMIDEAST.

During my stay, I also had a chance to attend a live class and this was another experience I will never forget. I realized that there is a big difference between the U.S. and Egypt in the way that students and professors deal with each other.

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I observed the way the American students debated in class and shared information with each other. I saw first-hand the “critical thinking” perspective to education, which encourages students to develop their own ideas and to offer critique of the articles and books they read in class.

Socially, I had to adjust to the way that people interact with one another, especially when you don’t know each other. During many of these meetings, we were asked to present ourselves, our occupation, and something brief about our countries. I felt a little shy at first, but I got so used to it. I was the only Middle Eastern female among my group of advisers, and so many program officers had tons of questions to ask about how females are treated in the Middle East, how we react to certain situations such as sexual harassments, etc. This was a good chance to respond to these questions about culture, family, gender, and education. I also addressed stereotypes that some had about the region, creating a learning opportunity for all of us.

Dealing with new food and table manners was another learning experience. Our hosts were interested to know what Egyptian food is like, and I told them about some traditional dishes and what we usually do when we host guests. I recall telling them that I was surprised at the food portions in the United States, which were huge. During group meals, I also noticed different manners. For instance, if someone at the table wanted the salt or pepper, they would ask someone close to it to pass it to them. In contrast, in Egypt we typically get out of our chairs to get the salt and pepper ourselves. Though these were minor differences, I enjoyed observing how different people eat and share a meal.

In order to continue my learning, I kept my journal every day. This kept me focused on my goals and it made it easy to share it later with my parents. Every day I was thinking of things I wanted to talk about when I got home. I took a lot of photos as well, since many people in Egypt, even if they had been to the U.S., were unlikely to have visited some of the beautiful sights in Colorado Springs, Minneapolis, and Fargo.

As I travelled, I realized I had another stereotype about safety in the United States. I assumed that I always needed to be suspicious and on-guard. During one tour in the Midwest, we were taken to a museum that was established as a tribute to a Cultural Counselor who decided to build a Viking Ship to cross the Atlantic. As we left the car, I realized that she did not lock it. So, I asked her about that, she told me laughing, “It’s safe out there. You know what...there’s more deer than people in this place.” I was giggling all the way to the entrance with this comment. That is how safe she felt in this place. I realized that every city and town was different in this country.

Through visiting those various campuses in the United States, I was able to discuss culture and education with students, professors, and admission officers in many different places. I realized that we can bridge cultures and better understand each other through these types of interactions. America is not what we necessarily picture in the movies. It is a land of diversity and in general, people value those that work hard to achieve their goals. People do not care who your parents are, as much as they care about who you are and what future you can build. Time will definitely decrease our differences if we really continue to try and accept one another. By keeping my focus on these issues, I managed to have the experience of my lifetime.

## International Student Advisers

From <http://www.educationusa.info/pages/students/help.php>

On almost all U.S. university campuses, the international student adviser (ISA) is the main source of assistance, advice, and other personal support you might need while you are in the United States. The ISA usually is based in an International Students Office, or department with a similar name, and is the person responsible for your orientation on arrival and for helping with visa and tax issues. If there is no official international student adviser at your chosen college or university, there will be some other person assigned to work with international students, at least on a part-time basis. When you receive your acceptance letter, you should receive the name of the international student adviser or of another person who acts in this capacity.

If no name is listed, request the information from the admissions office or check your college's or university's website. Write to the international student adviser or other appropriate person, informing him or her of your arrival date.



## Optional Professional Training (OPT) - Questions and Answers

### What is Optional Professional Training (OPT)?

OPT is a program that may allow qualifying international students to work in the United States for 12 months after completing their academic programs. Graduates from STEM-related fields (related to science, technology, engineering, and math) can apply for an additional 17 months of OPT.

### What are the requirements to participate in OPT?

To participate, a person must:

1. Have a valid F-1 visa
2. Complete 9 months of study in your program in the U.S.
3. Apply for OPT through your international student office between 60-90 days before you complete your academic program

4. Seek and obtain employment in your field of study
5. Be recommended by the DSO (immigration official) at the American institution that you attend.

### What type of program must I complete?

The program must be at least 2 months in duration. You could apply for OPT after a certificate program, after a bachelor's degree, after a masters degree, or after a doctoral degree.

### How many hours a week must I work during OPT?

OPT participants can work either part of full time.

## Special Opportunities

The University of Akron College of Business Administration offers numerous scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students, including full tuition scholarships.



## New Academic Programs

American University is starting two new doctoral degrees in psychology -- one in behavior, cognition, and neuroscience, and the other in clinical psychology.

Arizona State University is starting an online bachelor of science degree in criminology and criminal justice.

Frostburg State University is starting a minor in sustainability studies.

Hudson Valley Community College is starting an associate degree in physical sciences.

Mary Baldwin College is starting a major in Renaissance studies.

Drury University is introducing a graduate-level certificate in social media to be completed through Webinar series.

Fordham University is starting a master of arts degree in international humanitarian action.

Mott Community College is starting a certificate program in robotic programming.

Roosevelt University is starting a Ph.D. program in industrial-organizational psychology.

Rosemont College is starting a major in environmental studies.

State University of New York at Buffalo is starting a bachelor of science program in environmental geosciences.



## About AMIDEAST

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America-Mideast Educational and Training Services, Inc. (AMIDEAST) is a private, nonprofit organization that strengthens mutual understanding and cooperation between Americans and the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa. Every year, AMIDEAST provides English language and professional skills training, educational advising, and testing services to hundreds of thousands of students and professionals in the Middle East and North Africa; supports numerous institutional development projects in the region; and administers educational exchange programs. Founded in 1951, AMIDEAST is headquartered in Washington, DC with a network of field offices in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, West Bank/Gaza, and Yemen.

### Services & Programs

- Educational advising and information services
- Test administration and support
- English language training
- Scholarship and exchange program administration
- Professional training
- Institutional development
- Programs for Americans

<http://www.amideast.org>

## Group Advising Sessions

All group advising sessions at AMIDEAST are part of the EducationUSA Resource Center activities. All are free and open to the public.

Sessions in the next 3 months will include:

- General Undergraduate Session
- General Graduate Session
- Medical Residency Session
- Selecting a U.S. University
- Financial Aid
- Pre-departure Orientation
- Group Consultation: U.S. Student Visa Application Workshop

For a complete listing of these free group advising events, see [www.amideast.org](http://www.amideast.org) or join our Facebook group Study USA-Egypt

