Happy Holidays! From: The 2011-2012 Presidential Scholars

Fall 2011 Newsletter
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SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT: news@auc

By Jill Lyon

My first day as the scholar in the Office of University Communications was like any first day at a new job: overwhelming. This was the day I was introduced to “news@auc”, the daily AUC newsletter that I was told would be my “baby” for the following year.

As I became more and more acquainted with editing and formatting “news@auc”, I was told that the newsletter would be undergoing a much-needed face-lift and I would be leading the process. This change came in conjunction with a series of transformations in the Office of University Communications. After ten years of dedicated leadership, Director of Communications Nanci Martin left her position to return to the United States and Dina Abulfotuh from the Office of the President took her place. Dina strode into the position with ideas ablaze, including a commitment to revamping “news@auc” to make it easier to assemble and, most importantly, more user-friendly.

By my third week on the job, I was working closely with the web-developer of the new “news@auc” email. After the fifteenth test and subsequent revamping, I realized that the new “news@auc” was not going to be a gift handed to me on a format-friendly platter. Aside from technical difficulties, the most challenging part of launching the newly formatted newsletter was acquainting AUC staff members who post announcements or events to “news@auc” to the new format.

I quickly learned the importance of a strict policy and clear directions for posting announcements and events, and that a more user-friendly format does not guarantee a smooth transition.

Insha’allah, by the end of the year I will hand off “news@auc” to my successor with confidence that it will be the type of baby that doesn’t cry into the wee hours of the night. Now, that will be an accomplishment.

Jill graduated from Cornell University with a BA in Government and a minor in International Relations. She is the current scholar in the Office of University Communications. You may reach her at j.lyon@aucegypt.edu.
SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT: DDC

By Megan Prier

As the scholar in the Desert Development Center, I’ve come to realize, accept, and take advantage of the DDC’s role as an ambiguous entity that has a hand in everything green and sustainable at AUC and across Egypt.

I am at once a researcher analyzing data from trials on black mold in Egyptian onions (that black stuff on your onions is actually not mold, but dirt. And don’t worry; it’s not harmful in the least, just ugly. But, the vast majority of onions are infected and once infected won’t meet export quality), an advisor mentoring a project group for an introductory biology class and work-study students completing independent research projects, and a designer creating a composting plan for AUC campus and drawing architectural plans for a maintenance workshop on the DDC research farm.

I’ve witnessed the intricate scheming of Egyptian farmers vying to win an auction for citrus plants, played basketball with the DDC landscape workers, and met computer programmers and Egyptian water experts at the Water Hackathon, a competition co-hosted by the DDC and the World Bank to promote collaboration on developing technological solutions for Egypt’s water crisis. I’ve met with representatives from a high-end real estate development company for a collaborative project on the plans for a sustainably designed multi-use community in New Cairo, worked with a Dutch onion export company on the development of the onion research project and farmer awareness workshops, and partnered with AUC supply chain managers to overhaul AUC’s purchasing program by adding emphasis on social sustainability.

The DDC is a research institution that is unique in that it actively tailors its projects to the needs of the Egyptian community and focuses on the practical applicability of its work towards sustainable development in Egypt. Working as an active member of the institution has been a challenging but rewarding experience thus far.

Megan Prier graduated from Princeton University with a BSE in Civil and Environmental Engineering and a minor in International Relations. She is the current scholar in the Desert Development Center (DDC). She may be reached at megprier@aucegypt.edu.
I was able to take advantage of the extended Eid al-Fitr holiday to hop on a short two-hour flight to Istanbul, Turkey with an old friend living in Jordan. Though I wasn’t quite prepared for the cold weather, it was an incredible week and a welcome break from the cacophony of downtown Cairo.

We stayed at a hostel right in the heart of the old city in Istanbul and a short walk from Istiklal Street, a mile-long stretch of pedestrian walkway consisting of a broad, cobblestone street with a trolley line through the middle. Due to Eid, the promenade was packed full of (mostly Turkish) tourists looking to eat and shop at the near-infinite number of restaurants, cafes, retail stores and bookshops, as vendors strategically placed themselves and peddled fresh Bosphorus mussels and roasted chestnuts. Sticking to my budget, I mostly stayed with cheap kabob, which was still a welcome change from the beans and falafel of Cairo. The Iskander kabob, in particular, with yogurt and tomato sauce over a healthy portion of shaved beef, was an artery-clogging highlight.

The city is best seen on foot and over my six-day trip I got a great sense of the place just walking through various neighborhoods. It’s quite modern, with great public transportation and—unlike Cairo—actual traffic laws! Istanbul’s enduring appeal comes from the contrast of this modernity with an old tower, a mosque or a palace weaved into the cityscape. Somehow it all coexists and flows together, offering an interesting picture of what Cairo itself might become. Aside from the interplay of the old with the new, the contrast between West and East adds yet another layer of complexity and richness to the city. (Continued on the next page)
Indeed, with the rest of Turkey on the eastern side of the Bosporus—a strait that acts as a continental divide between Europe and Asia—an “Eastern” influence is unavoidable. It often looked and felt like we were in the former Soviet Union rather than Turkey as many old buildings in the underdeveloped and less gentrified areas of the city are still dilapidated Soviet-era concrete boxes. Alternatively, the more ‘developed’ areas were of a decidedly European character, with new apartments and chic stores centered on neoclassical buildings remaining from Ottoman efforts at westernization. These underlying differences between Eastern and Western ideas of Turkey, then, revealed the fissures between levels of piety, education and class. Yet both elements seemed comfortable comingling in Istanbul’s public spaces and despite any underlying differences there seemed to be an agreeable symbiosis that disarmed any tension.

All in all it was an incredible trip and a welcome break, but I was surprisingly keen on getting back to Egypt—I somehow missed the familiar claustrophobia and organized chaos more than I realized. But with the unique opportunity to see this part of the world from our home base here in Cairo, I look forward to using my vacation time to explore other Middle Eastern countries.

**WHERE ELSE HAVE THE SCHOLARS GONE?**
Camping in the White and Black Desert; A trip to the Zabbaleen (Garbage Collectors’ area) by Moqqattam and the Cave Monasteries; Hot springs-hopping in Siwa Oasis; Camel and horseback riding around the Saqqara Pyramids; Relaxing at Ain Sokhna; Enjoying the bohemian lifestyle of Dahab and Rashitan and the luxury of Sharm El Sheikh; Exploring the mosques of Islamic Cairo and churches of Coptic Cairo, and many more!
Leisure: belly dancing classes

By Abike Kamson

The last three months in Cairo have been filled with a series of unforgettable events: from exploring Egypt’s alluring deserts and relaxing havens along the Red Sea to witnessing a post-Arab Spring revolution in Tahrir Square—not to mention the heavy doses of traffic encountered along the way—Egypt thus far has been nothing short of a splendid adventure. Cairo’s lively and dynamic nature is exhausting at times, but I was able to find my “reenergize” button in a charming studio on Zamalak’s Bahgat Ali Street, where I am learning the art of *raqs baladi*, or belly dancing.

Once a week I attend this class with a few other ladies, including my friend and fellow scholar Michelle, to shake off the stresses of living in Cairo and enjoy the soothing and sensual environment of belly dance. I hear the “Father of Mediterranean Music”, otherwise known as Amr Diab, in the background as Angela, our gracious dance instructor with over 20 years of belly dancing experience, guides our movements and begins the class. We mimic her hips, moving them from side to side in sharp pops and gradually changing them in and out of more fluid motions as our arms and hands parallel these variations, all the while our feet are keeping us grounded. Every part of the body is utilized, and I am baffled as I recall the professional belly dancers I’ve seen and how their movements appeared incredibly effortless. Tied around our hips are shawls, an essential accessory to any belly dancing costume; and although we have not upgraded yet to the coin attachments for the sound effect, the blend of colors in our shawls serve to add a powerful dynamic to our movements. The mirrors are beautifully paneled against the walls, but seem to highlight my missteps and awkward imitations of Angela’s skilled movements. Luckily, we are all belly dancing beginners and the mood always feels silly and light.

Although the class is just one hour, the time spent with a group of women moving rhythmically to classically Arab music does wonders for relieving stress and instantly feeds the soul. Angela, her belly dancing class, and my fellow lady belly dancers are gems and I cannot wait to discover more of the hidden treasures to be found in the bustling city of Cairo.

Abike Kamson graduated from George Washington University with a BA in International Affairs, concentrating in Middle Eastern Studies. She is the current scholar in the Office of the VP for Planning and Administration. She may be reached at abikekamson@aucegypt.edu.
“Spice Girl! Spice Girl, come back. I love you!” a young Egyptian man yells at me. If only he said I looked like Taylor Swift, things may have turned out differently, but instead he chose “Spice Girl” and didn’t even specify which one. He certainly won’t be spicing up my life any time soon. But I digress. This is just one mild instance of harassment in Egypt. Before you get the idea that I’m some timeless beauty worthy of adoration from all who lay eyes upon me, let me describe myself: I’m blonde, blue eyed and as ghostly white as Casper. You don’t need to be Einstein to figure out I’m a foreigner. This is especially apparent when I speak Arabic with a southern accent—and I’m from Pittsburgh, so who knows how that one worked out. Despite my stunning good looks and eloquent pronunciation, let me just say it all doesn’t matter because, bottom line, there is nothing more alluring to Egyptian men than a foreign woman.

So Ladies, before you come here to the land of pyramids, get in the front seat of that black and white taxi, make eye contact and smile politely to everyone in the streets, allow me to clarify a few things so you’re not sold for five camels to a man in a gallabiya with three wives (Muslim men are allowed four wives in Egypt, if you’re picking up what I’m putting down): first, you’re worth more than five camels, just in case the situation comes up. Don’t settle for less. But seriously: men will harass, and despite the “I am woman, hear me roar” voice inside of you wanting to smack any guy who treats you as less than equal, I promise it’s best to ignore. Always travel in groups, keep covered in certain areas, and yada yada yada. Heed all of these warnings and I assure you, you’ll still be harassed. Women who wear the niqab, the head to toe covering where only the eyes are revealed, still get the occasional whistle. Try not to feel degraded. Try to accept it as part of the culture. Fighting it will only seem like you’re swimming the Nile upstream.

If there is one piece of advice that has gotten me through the rough times in Cairo, it’s these three words: embrace the chaos. It took me half a semester to stop trying to make Cairo conform to the world I had previously known and begin to love and accept Al Qahira for what it is: a beautiful, constant struggle. But with struggle comes growth. And you will certainly grow during your adventure in Egypt.

Amy Prosser graduated from Washington & Jefferson College with a BA in Business Administration and Psychology. She is the current scholar in the Office of the VP for Finance. She may be reached at alynnprosser@aucegypt.edu.
30 YEARS LATER: THE FIRST SCHOLAR LOOKS BACK

By Frank Packard

I had the privilege of being the very first intern. It was an honor I have never forgotten to be living in Egypt and to be learning from my Egyptian colleagues at AUC. During my year of service, 1981-82, history unfolded in front of my eyes. I lived in Dokki, nearby the Sheraton hotel, across the street from the Russian school and not far from the residence of President Sadat, who died within three weeks of my arrival in Cairo. Immediately, President Reagan sent to the funeral all the other living American presidents: Carter, Ford and Nixon. I do not believe three American presidents have ever -- before or since -- attended the funeral service of an international leader. This gesture led many Egyptians to express even warmer feelings than before -- if that was even possible! -- toward Americans. Those were heady days to be alive in Egypt.

Of course, history flows on and it moves into its own channels. The day that I flew out of Cairo in June 1982, Israel entered Lebanon, and I do not think the Americans who followed me to Egypt and the Middle East ever again enjoyed such a warm reception as I was permitted to receive during my time in Cairo.

I came to see America in a very different light than how I saw it during the preceding four years I had spent at Princeton, and my experience at AUC changed the course of my life. I came to see what a young country America is, how much it has to learn from older cultures such as Egypt, and how a truly educated person spends their time with people from all walks of life and from all corners of the world. After my year with AUC I resolved to develop a career outside of America, where I could continue the learning and personal development trajectory. After the year as an intern at AUC I have spent my career in finance. For the last 25 years I have based myself either in Tokyo or in Hong Kong. Today I am a partner in boutique investment firm that distributes hedge funds and private equity funds to institutional investors.

Rebecca Gaghen (1984-1985, Alumni) lived in Paris, France since 2001. She is head of communications and information at the International Energy Agency/OECD, an international organisation that advises industrialised nations on sound energy policies that balance security, sustainability and economic growth. Before moving to Paris, Rebecca was a Foreign Service Officer in the US Department of State with postings in the Dominican Republic, Venezuela and the United Nations in New York; her last assignment was a political appointment as Deputy Chief of Staff at the US Department of Energy. She started her career as an intern at AUC – a memorable year on many levels that sparked her interest in foreign policy. Although it has been over 25 years since her time at AUC, she keeps in touch with fellow interns Ted Osius and Jane Bliss.

She is pictured to the right with fellow intern Ted Osius (right; 1984-1985, President), who is now Deputy Chief of Mission at the US Embassy in Indonesia. The picture was taken when a group of friends met on Komodo Island for a week-long sailing trip in celebration of Ted’s 50th birthday.
Elizabeth Smith (1992-1993, Planning) currently lives in Vermont teaching Anthropology at the University of Vermont, and will be in Cairo Jan-July of 2012 doing new research.

Linda Bishai (1987-1988, Dean) is a Senior Program Officer at the Academy for International Conflict Management and Peacebuilding at the United States Institute of Peace.

Nathan Martin (1988-1989, Provost) is currently working as a Rabbi and serving as the Director of Student Life at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Wyncote, Pennsylvania where he focuses on community building, co-curricular programming and pastoral support. He has two young children and a great spouse and is particularly grateful to be working in an environment where so many people are concerned with spiritual practice around cultivating compassion and with how to be actively engaged with issues of justice as Jewish leaders. As a committed environmentalist he recently helped organize students and faculty to participate in a Jewish environmental bike ride to raise money for environmental sustainability organizations. Search for “RRC Rides for food justice” on Youtube to watch the video!

Bradley J. Cook (1990-1991, President) is the current Provost at Southern Utah University. He received his doctorate from Oxford University in Middle Eastern Studies and Education. He currently lives in Provo and is married to Terri Kerr Cook. They have four children: Sam, Cairo, Jack and Charlie.

Sutherland Miller (1991-1992, President) is working as the Chief of Party of USAID’s Knowledge Sharing and Analysis (KSA) project, an $11.3 million dollar initiative to advise the U.S. Agency for International Development’s Africa Bureau in knowledge management, performance monitoring, and identifying and disseminating best practices related to trade development, enabling environment policy reform, overcoming infrastructure constraints, and

Susanna Marshland (1987-1988, AUC Press) currently works as the Chief Operations Officer for a non-profit social services agency in California, Fred Finch Youth Center.

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Fariba Nawa (1996-1997, Caravan) and her husband Naeem had a second daughter, Andisha Safa Azizian, and bought a home in Newark, California. Naeem got into University of California, Berkeley in the international development program, and Fariba published her first book called Opium Nation: Child Brides, Drug Lords and One Woman’s Journey Through Afghanistan. She is a freelance journalist and author; her website is www.faribanawa.com.
Thank you,
Dr. Thompson!

This year’s scholars were fortunate enough to meet Dr. Libby Thompson during her visit to Cairo this December! She shared with us her insight regarding everything from journalism and Middle Eastern history to classic must-see Egyptian films over donuts and coffee. Thank you so much, Dr. Thompson!

Elizabeth F. Thompson (1982-1983, President) is associate professor of modern Middle Eastern history at the University of Virginia and author of Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon (2000). She is currently completing a history of political movements since the 19th century, tentatively titled Justice Interrupted: Constitutionalism and Political Violence in the Middle East, and forthcoming from Harvard University Press. She is also co-director of a seminar on World War I in the Middle East for the National Endowment for the Humanities, to be held this summer in Washington, DC. Her next project will bring her back to Egypt to study movies and their audiences in the 1930s-1950s for a book titled Cinema and the Politics of Late Colonialism.

After participating in the Presidential Scholars Program, Lisa Bernasek (1996-1997, President) spent two years in Morocco as a Peace Corps Volunteer, then did a PhD in Social Anthropology and Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard. Her dissertation focused on North African material culture in museums and cultural associations in France, looking at issues of representation and national identity. Since 2007 she has worked at the University of Southampton at LLAS, a centre that supports academics teaching in languages, linguistics and area studies. She is currently the Academic Coordinator for the UK Islamic Studies Network. She and her husband Louis have two girls: Adele who is 3 and Margot who is just 3 months.

Dwan Dixon (1998-1999, OPIR) is currently based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia working as Country Director for PATH where she oversees projects in HIV/AIDS, nutrition, malaria and tuberculosis. She says Ethiopia is amazing as is South Africa and Kenya, where she lived for five years before relocating to Ethiopia.

Danica Lo (1999-2000, Caravan) is the Senior Online Fashion & Beauty Editor at Glamour. She currently resides in New York.

Phung Pham (2000-2001, Public Relations) is currently the Foundation Officer at the Philanthropic Solutions department at Bank of America Merrill Lynch, located in Boston, MA.

Michael Allen (2000-2001, Center for Adult and Continuing Education) began his doctorate in Comparative Literature at the University of California, Berkeley after returning from Egypt. In 2008, upon filing his dissertation, he was in the Society of Fellows in the Humanities at Columbia University and taught classes in MEALAC and Comparative Literature. As of 2009, he has been an Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Oregon, where he teaches courses on postcolonial studies, literary theory and visual culture. This academic year he is on leave and working as an EUME Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin. He spent last summer in Tangier, Morocco, as the Site Director for a CLS Arabic Program, and he plans to return once again this summer to direct the program.
**Ryan Greene-Roesel** (2001-2002, OPIR) lives in Berkeley California and works as a consultant in transportation planning. Up until recently she was playing Egyptian nay (reed flute) in the Arab Orchestra of San Francisco, but is taking a hiatus because of the arrival of her new baby son, Phoenix.

**Diana Heise** (2001-2002, Web Development) was recently awarded a Fulbright Fellowship in the Creative and Performing Arts. She will be living on the isle of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean for most of next year, making artworks that celebrate healing, peace-making and stories of resilience.

**Graeme Wood** (2002-2003, Web Development) is a journalist writing for The Atlantic and the IHT, among other publications. He has enjoyed getting back to Egypt more frequently this year.

**Luke W. Dunlap** (2002-2003, President) is living in Austin, working at the University of Texas at Austin as director of development and external relations for the School of Architecture. He hopes to return to Cairo next December.

**Geoffrey Gresh** (2002-2003, Rare Books) completed his PhD in international relations this past spring from the Fletcher School at Tufts University. Currently, he is Assistant Professor of international security studies at National Defense University in Washington, DC.

**Kristin Mendoza** (2001-2002, President) is an attorney at Latham & Watkins, LLP.

**Caroline “Carrie” Foster** (2004-2005, CACE) lives in Santiago, Chile, teaching high school history at an international school.

**Anders Blewett** (2003-2004, DDC) currently practices civil litigation in Great Falls, Montana. He was elected to the Montana House of Representatives in 2008 and to the Montana Senate in 2010.

**Erica Gaston** (2003-2004, President) is currently working as a human rights lawyer for the Open Society Institute, focusing on conflict-related issues in Afghanistan and Pakistan. She splits her time between Afghanistan, Pakistan and D.C.

**Karle Saemi** (2001-2002, Rare Books) had the opportunity to connect with some of AUC’s partners in Egypt, one of whom was the relief and development group in CARE-Egypt. Upon returning to the US her firsthand exposure to CARE’s work overseas positioned her well to begin working for the organization in policy analysis and advocacy. She currently serves as Director of the President’s Office and Internal Communication. CARE reached over 82 million people last year with efforts to improve basic education, prevent the spread of disease, increase access to clean water and sanitation, expand economic opportunity and protect natural resources. The lifelong connections, friendships and experience gained from the Scholars program are ones that have been invaluable to her.

While working in the Center for Adult and Continuing education at AUC, **Jo- Ellen Saemi** (2001-2002) had the opportunity to connect with some of AUC’s partners in Egypt, one of whom was the relief and development group in CARE-Egypt. Upon returning to the US her firsthand exposure to CARE’s work overseas positioned her well to begin working for the organization in policy analysis and advocacy. She currently serves as Director of the President’s Office and Internal Communication. CARE reached over 82 million people last year with efforts to improve basic education, prevent the spread of disease, increase access to clean water and sanitation, expand economic opportunity and protect natural resources. The lifelong connections, friendships and experience gained from the Scholars program are ones that have been invaluable to her.

**Caroline Foster** (2004-2005, President) is living in Santiago, Chile, teaching high school history at an international school.

**Anders Blewett** (2003-2004, DDC) currently practices civil litigation in Great Falls, Montana. He was elected to the Montana House of Representatives in 2008 and to the Montana Senate in 2010.

**Karle Saemi** (2001-2002, Rare Books) is a Rotary World Peace Fellow studying peace and conflict resolution in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where she focuses on the role of cultural heritage in peace building.
Alex Halsema (2006-2007, President) has been working at the World Bank Group for several years now on various corporate projects. In 2009, she rode her bicycle across the US and Canada to raise money and awareness for the cause of affordable housing. She continues to tell anyone who will listen that they should see and experience the wonders of Egypt.

Jeff Bellis (2008-2009, Communications and Marketing) is in Melbourne, Australia debating when to start an MA program. At the moment he is island-hopping around the Caribbean and then Colombia before returning to NYC for Xmas. He misses koshari.

Robert Gasior (2008-2009, Gerhart Center) is a Program Associate for the Office of Foreign Secretaries/International Affairs at the National Academy of Sciences. He coordinates several programs related to science & technology cooperation including: USAID Grand Challenges in International Development and the Arab-American Frontiers of Science, Engineering, and Medicine program.

Alison Damick (2006-2007, PVA) just finished a two year research post at the British Institute in Amman, Jordan, and is now doing a PhD in Anthropology, Archaeology track at Columbia University in New York City.

Fauzia Dawood (2007-2008, Gerhart Center) is currently a 2nd year MBA candidate at the Yale School of Management. She spent her summer in Cairo interning for Endeavor Egypt, a non profit organization that supports high-impact entrepreneurs in developing countries. While at Endeavor, Fauzia worked specifically on developing a sustainability plan for the organization, paying particular attention to corporate partnerships.

After completing her MBA degree (May 2012), Fauzia will return to Cairo to get married (August 2012). She is looking forward to being back in Cairo permanently, and hopes to join an investment firm, focusing specifically on investing in small and medium enterprises in the MENA region.

Kelsey Norman (2007-2008, IPART) is a PhD candidate in Political Science at UC Irvine.

After returning from Cairo, Lauren Linakis (2008-2009, President) worked as a research associate for Steven Cook at the Council on Foreign Relations. While she was there, she helped him research and fact check his book, which is now published, called The Struggle for Egypt. She is now at the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University studying political development in the Middle East.

Celia Smalls (2007-2008, President) is currently in her 2nd year of law school at the University of Washington, where she is also a Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellow studying Arabic. She resides in Seattle, Washington.

Ellen Echols (2010-2011, Development) is working as the Development Coordinator at Franklin Tomorrow, a community development nonprofit organization in Franklin, Tennessee.
PLEASE HELP US LOCATE MISSING SCHOLARS:
Email michelle.ha@aucegypt.edu with updates!

See you in 2012!

Love, the 2011-2012 Scholars