

Through my experience in the Ibrahim Leadership and Dialogue Project, I plan on erasing stereotypes and prejudices that certain groups have against others. I wish to focus on the Middle East and encourage change through dialogue. Parts of the Middle East have recently been moving towards more conservative and extreme visions of religion. This change needs to be addressed and understood in global and western dialogue.

I would like to facilitate dialogue within my academic and surrounding community at UC Berkeley. Up to this point, I have only seen individual events by a particular organization address current issues in the Middle East. I have not seen different student groups voice their opinions in public over controversial topics, possibly due to a lack of free space. In addition, I have not seen any joint or collaborative events between disparate communities in order to foster necessary dialogue. I have gotten a sense that there has been a privatization in discourse regarding the on-goings of Israel, Syria, and the rest of the Middle East. Each organization will hold discussions on issues pertaining to their respective view. However, due to a certain limitation, members of these organizations are solely exposed to the perspectives of their respected community. This does not facilitate cross-religious and cross-cultural understanding.

Therefore, I would like to collaborate with people of Judeo-Christian beliefs and people of Islamic beliefs. I plan on encouraging discourse and debate on the occurrences in the Middle East, from Iran to Israel and Syria. I want to have discussion within a safe and free environment where constructive debates and criticisms can be made. I would like to see different student groups voicing their opinions and perspectives on political, social, and religious occurrences. Discourse on the global scale is utmost necessary in order to better relations and relieve rising pressures and strains within societies. Thus, a counterspace for religious groups to meet and converse on the rising tensions in the Middle East would be ideal.

I would like to facilitate open discussion across the UC Berkeley campus. I would like to ensure free speech for all, which would not include hate speech. Through ensuring open and free speech, people will be more inclined to speaking freely with each other. I would like to work towards erasing stereotypes on the so-called inclusive campus of UC Berkeley. I say this because I have seen students form exclusive groups based on identity and opinions. I specifically don't like this human practice because it results in the exclusion of individuals from open space and can result in the demoralization or dehumanization of certain individuals. This can lead to insecurities and damage the self-esteem of students on campus. Only through understanding and tolerance, can society work towards erasing negative stereotypes and ignorance in general.

I would invite different faith, ethnic, and cultural groups to participate in these discussions. Regardless of whether those groups have personal, familial, or religious attachments to the Middle East, I believe that everyone should have an emotional and humane attachment to the civilians of the region, who are often the ones that face the worst circumstances. Also, through having other student organizations present at such conferences, people will be able to make personal connections between different occurrences. For example, a certain religious intolerance shown by the Pakistani state, Israeli state, and increasingly the Indian state can be linked to the nationalist parties in power. Therefore, discourse can be conducted on how certain national or ethnic propagandas form. There is almost always a root cause for ethnic or religious uprising and attack. The actual solution to such problems is much

more complex. But through understanding how certain agendas and powerful perspectives rise, a population will have greater intuition and resources in order to tackle the problem.

Therefore, I believe that my Ibrahim Leadership and Dialogue Program experience will have a significant impact on my future plans for fostering mutual understanding and acceptance between various faiths and cultures. I plan on fostering the creation of a free environment on the UC Berkeley campus. Through an open environment, people will be more inclined and feel safe when bringing up fairly controversial issues. With the facilitation of dialogue on campus, people will be more educated on issues and understand the various perspectives and ideologies on certain global issues.

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