

I come from a community of people who have various negative misconceptions of Muslims and Arabs. I know individuals who truly believe that (a) all Arabs are terrorists, (b) all Muslim women are oppressed, and/or (c) all Arab Muslims have the same culture. While I know these impressions to be blatantly false, my only rebuttal are of facts I recall from articles I read and/or from my professors. After visiting various Middle Eastern countries and meeting people of different faiths and cultures, I would finally be able to provide members of my communities with a clearer picture of the Middle East and its people. Instead of with mere facts and statistics, I could enlighten my friends and family with my own real-life interactions, and convince them to familiarize themselves with the diversity of Middle East societies.

Throughout the Ibrahim Leadership and Dialogue Program, I plan to keep an online blog to document my experiences, share my thoughts, and allow my family, friends, and the larger world of social media to join the trip vicariously. In high school, I had a YouTube channel dedicated to sharing my beliefs and experiences as an Orthodox Jew with the world; it had over 100,000 views. Perhaps I would even restart my video blog for this trip to teach others about the Middle East and to inspire them to seek out opportunities to learn about other cultures.

Back at Brandeis, I plan to incorporate what I gain from the program into my extra-curricular activities. I already occasionally attend the Muslim Student Association's events, and I expect that my experiences abroad will strengthen my involvement with that club. Additionally, I plan to co-sponsor an educational event with MSA through the Brandeis Orthodox Organization, of which I am the Education Coordinator, in order to foster increased understanding between our two faiths. Perhaps other fellows from the Ibrahim Leadership and Dialogue Program would visit Brandeis to speak on a panel and share their influential anecdotes from the trip. Furthermore, Brandeis Visions for Israel in an Evolving World (bVIEW), of which I am Co-Executive Coordinator, has been considering expanding its focus to the greater Middle East and holding an event to share a broader view and facilitate a larger discussion regarding the entire region. My experiences from the Ibrahim Program would definitely assist me in planning this event to discuss the real issues that affect different societies throughout the Middle East.

While my courses at Brandeis have provided me with a great deal of knowledge about Islam and the Middle East, experiencing the realities on the ground would afford me a greater educational dimension. Few of my peers have visited more than one Middle Eastern country, if at all. While I cannot take my peers with me on the trip, relaying my stories from the program in class will enhance and contextualize the material for my peers and perhaps even teach my professors something new. Moreover, the community leaders and entrepreneurs I hear from on the trip may inspire me to conduct a senior thesis or other research project on their work and their communities. In the future, I hope to work for a think tank on the Middle East or in the field of international relations, so the experiences I have on this trip and the tools of understanding I will gain are sure to benefit me throughout my life.

My experiences on the Ibrahim Leadership and Dialogue Program ultimately would not just affect me, but would influence my surrounding communities as well. The places I see, the people I meet, and the ideas I hear are sure to have a lifelong effect on me and have a ripple effect on the people I interact with after the trip. This will include my family, friends, peers, and the larger world of social media. As a leader in my community at Brandeis in multiple capacities, I have a large spectrum of individuals with whom to share my experiences from the program. I

will surely incorporate what I learn from the trip into my academic studies and my professional life, and will continue to use my experiences to foster mutual understanding between different faiths and cultures throughout my life.

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