

# LAU matters

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF LAU NY | SPRING 2018



(L-R) Rita Zihenni, Dr. Joseph G. Jabbara, Mrs. Aida Sharabati Shawwaf and Hon. Majdi Ramadan



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## LAU-NY's 6th Annual Gala Raises Funds

More than 150 benefactors attended LAU New York's gala dinner to celebrate and support the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World.

LAU New York held its sixth annual gala on April 26 at the New York Athletic Club overlooking Central Park in Manhattan. The gala was a memorable night filled with music, laughter and a silent auction. The packed house of supporters gathered to honor LAU's legacy as a school founded by a woman, for women, with this year's proceeds earmarked for LAU's **Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World** (IWSAW). Established in 1973, IWSAW is a pioneer in academic research on women in the Middle East and seeks to empower women through development programs and education.

Guests at the gala were shown a video produced by IWSAW on their work with disadvantaged women in Lebanon. One of IWSAW's many community outreach initiatives is to teach women – both Lebanese and refugees in the country – basic life skills to better their living situations and those of their families. The women learn about topics such as food safety, childproofing their homes and family planning that will have an immediate and lasting impact. IWSAW also **trains social workers in Lebanon** to incorporate the basic life skills training into their practices.





The LAU NY Gala has become a significant gathering for the friends and supporters of the university, and provides an opportunity to honor special individuals and showcase their achievements. Ed Shiner, director of alumni and special projects at LAU NY, remarked, “The gala is not only a fundraiser but a wonderful time to bring the LAU extended family together to celebrate the university’s growth and development and to reinforce its mission.”

LAU President Joseph G. Jabbra presented the prestigious Sarah Huntington Smith Awards to Aida Sharabati Shawwaf, a humanitarian focusing on women’s education in the Middle East and Syrian refugees in Lebanon, and to Majdi Ramadan, consul general for Lebanon in New York.

Jabbra reminded guests of Sarah Huntington Smith’s **long journey** from Norwich, Connecticut to the shores of Beirut. “She decides to give up all material possessions in 1835 to establish the first institution, perhaps in the world, for the education of women in the Ottoman Empire. That institution is now LAU,” he exclaimed.

Honoree Shawwaf is a strong advocate for women’s education in the Middle East. She spoke passionately about the importance of IWSAW focusing on women’s education to alleviate many social ills, including poverty, family health and illiteracy. “IWSAW’s work will contribute

to real cultural change leading to a more equitable society with equal access to economic and political power for all,” Shawwaf said.

The second honoree of the evening, Consul General Ramadan, has served the Lebanese community through extensive outreach, interaction and promotion of all events related to the Lebanese diaspora in the northeastern US. Ramadan thanked LAU for the award: “LAU provides an education that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity and change. It instills confidence and a sense of social responsibility in them; and, above all, the ability to question what one is told or presented with. You are a community that gives, and I am thankful for that.”

Journalist Rita Zihenni kept the audience entertained as the master of ceremonies, as did Lebanese tenor Amine Hachem with

“ IWSAW’s work will contribute to real cultural change leading to a more equitable society with equal access to economic and political power for all.

- Aida Sharabati Shawwaf

Brian Holman on the piano, who gave stellar performances throughout the evening. Guests bid on luxury items as part of the silent auction, which raised close to \$7,000 for IWSAW by the end of the evening. Jabbra affirmed the sentiment of the night, stating, “With your support, we will continue to carry out our educational mission with determination and drive. Excellence is our passion; LAU is our pride.”



Tenor Amine Hachem singing the American and Lebanese national anthems





# An Essential Lesson

## LAU leads Model UN Conference for high-school students to help instill leadership and diplomatic skills in future generations.

From May 10 to 12, 1,550 high-school students led by 200 advisors from 87 schools attended the Global Classroom International (GCI) Model UN conference for high schoolers in New York City. Participating students hailed from China, Germany, Japan, Lebanon, Mexico, Qatar, South Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States, and broadened their diplomatic horizons while gaining important leadership skills.

During the conference, students formed 16 committees and simulated the negotiation processes at the United Nations through discussing a wide range of global topics such as the legality of drones as weapons of war, election monitoring, greenhouse gas emissions and the 2020 Health Care Climate Challenge. These exercises allowed the students to cultivate qualities that exemplify great leaders, such as self-confidence, courage, empathy and humility.

“Young diplomats do learn, unlearn and re-learn throughout their lives. Model UN shuns and reduces cultural prejudices, broadens intellectual horizons and bestows leadership skills on the students of today and the decision makers, agenda setters and thought leaders of tomorrow,” said Elie Samia, assistant vice president for **outreach and civic engagement** for LAU’s Department of **Student Development and Enrollment Management**. “LAU’s partnership with United Nations Association-USA aims at expanding the reach of the GCI program to youth from all over the globe.”

**GCI-Model UN** is the flagship education program of the Lebanese American University. For the past three years, **LAU has led GCI in New York City**, which UNA-USA has operated since 1999.



The high schoolers had the chance to interact with key figures in the fields of diplomacy and international relations, including Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development and Chief Economist in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs Elliott Harris, Director of UNESCO NY Marie Paule Roudil, and Executive Director of World Health Organization-NY Nata Menabde.

“LAU’s partnership with United Nations Association-USA aims at expanding the reach of the GCI program to youth from all over the globe.”

- Elie Samia

Student leader Sangare Mati Brahima, a graduate from Alabama State University, has attended two GCI conferences. She says her first GCI experience impacted her tremendously, and she felt she needed to come back and participate again. Brahima felt that the simulation sessions were key because they offered real-life challenges that “stimulate the way we think and process information as far as creating innovative solutions through the way that the simulations are conducted with the students and the student leaders.”

Another student leader, Imran Ahmad Ali from Punjab, India, is a veteran of Model

UN conferences. Ali has participated in over 62, first as a delegate and then as either a chair or a director of a committee. For him, these conferences offer skills that he can apply to his future career. He contended that it made it more likely for the high schoolers to imagine themselves as future leaders by “seeing yourself act as the person you wish to be in ten years,” he said.

Many of the delegates agreed. One delegate, Yoon-Jin Lee of GC Seoul High School in South Korea, wants to be a diplomat or lawyer. Lee shared that the “GCI Model UN is a unique and special experience that helps me gain problem-solving skills by seeing the world and the problems that it faces more objectively and critically.”

Simulation programs such as GCI are part of the United Nations’ larger efforts to establish peace, to secure human rights, and to enable all people to live in dignity by imparting the UN culture to future generations.



# Young Delegates Convene for Model UN

LAU hosts world's largest Model UN Conference for Middle Schoolers in New York.



From March 22 to 24, 1,600 students from 85 middle schools from all around the world convened in New York City for the 2018 **Global Classrooms International (GCI) Model UN Middle School conference**.

Model UN is an educational simulation in which students learn about diplomacy, international relations, and the role and history of the United Nations. Participants in Model UN conferences, known as delegates, are placed on committees and assigned countries to represent at the gatherings.

The United Nations Association of the United States of America has been running the GCI Model UN since 1999. In 2016, LAU joined the program and has been hosting the event and sending students to New York for its conferences.

The experience enhances students' knowledge of international diplomacy, improves their public speaking and debating skills, helps them navigate the UN's rules and procedures, and, ultimately, puts them on the path to global citizenship.

"Bringing young students from all over the world to simulate the United Nations committees and discuss world affairs is a hands-on training in diplomacy, diversity and democracy," said Elie Samia, assistant vice president for **outreach and civic engagement** for LAU's Department of **Student Development and Enrollment Management**. "LAU is indeed a champion

of the power of argument instead of the argument of power."

Student leaders and first-time delegates alike noted the transformative power of being part of the program.

Student leader Ameer Alsamman, 22, has taken part in various MUN simulation programs with LAU for the last four years. The final-year international affairs major described how the program transformed him. "These programs have allowed me to ascend to a greater level of leadership. Taking part in MUN helps us with diplomacy, dignity, rule of law and what it means to be a human being," he said.

Rubetta Jumpah, 12, of SOS Hermann Gmeiner School in Ghana, represented South Korea. It was her first time participating in the GCI MUN conference. Rubetta and Jasmine Anane, 10, from Rosharon Montessori School, also in Ghana, were both excited to be at the conference in New York, witnessing so many cultures interacting. What they said they loved most of all was hearing different languages and making new friends. "My experience at the conference is giving me confidence," said Jasmine. "I feel that I know what I am doing." She hopes one day to become a president. Rubetta, not to be outshone, wants to be an ambassador.

Another first-time delegate, Zohayb Sherwan, 11, of Al-Ghazaly High School in



New Jersey, was representing the Kingdom of Morocco. Zohayb joined the Model UN program to carry on the family tradition and because, he said, he really enjoys debating. He said the simulation program "helps people speak in public and be able to express their ideas to anyone." He suggested that even if a fellow middle schooler does not want to pursue a career in diplomacy, everyone should join the program, because "They learn a lot about different countries and if they ever want to travel to those countries, then they'll know what to look for."

The future global leaders also had the opportunity to meet with key figures representing international governments and non-government actors in the fields of diplomacy and international relations, including Senior Economic Affairs Officer at the UN Economic and Social Council Eric Olson, Director and Deputy to the Assistant Secretary General for Human Rights Craig Mokhiber, and Senior Public Information Officer to the High Commissioner for Refugees Dana Sleiman.

Gas LAU student leader Ameer Alsamman concluded, "We become the leaders that we want, we can then implement the change in the world that we want."

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Top: LAU Student Leader Ameer Alsamman  
Bottom: Middle School Delegate Zohayb Sherwan





## LAU CHAT with Khalil Dreyfus Zaarour

LAU Matters sat down with Khalil Dreyfus Zaarour while he was in New York for the screening. Below is the edited conversation.

LAU NY and CUNY's Middle East and Middle Eastern American Center (MEMEAC) hosted a film screening of the award-winning movie *Nour*, which sheds light on the issue of child marriage in Lebanon.

The screening was followed by a discussion with the film's director and LAU alumnus, Khalil Dreyfus Zaarour. It was moderated by Beth Baron, director of MEMEAC at CUNY Graduate Center.

### Why did you choose to become a filmmaker?

I've wanted to become a storyteller since I was 12. During the Lebanese Civil War, I saw an Italian movie called *Cinema Paradiso*, and knew right then that I wanted to be a visual storyteller. There were no film schools at the time in Lebanon, but many cinemas. When I started studying at LAU in 1996, I asked the chair of the film department, "What do I have to do to get to Hollywood?" The reply was, "First, buy a ticket."

I later realized that my place as a filmmaker was not in Hollywood, but Lebanon. I did some short films at LAU, one of which was screened at a film festival in Milan in 1998. This was followed by a low budget short film in 2006, named *The Window* – my passport to my next feature film. In 2011, I produced *Malaki*, a docufiction on the missing of the Lebanese Civil War. It was the first documentary to be shown in Lebanese cinemas. It didn't make much at the box office since it wasn't a commercial film, but it did very well at festivals around the world. In 2014, I started working on *Nour*.



Dr. Beth Baron with Khalil Dreyfus Zaarour



Dr. Beth Baron, Jeremy Randall and Khalil Dreyfus Zaarour

## What are some of the challenges of being a filmmaker in Lebanon?

It is always a challenge to become a filmmaker in Lebanon. There is no industry. It's a self-made choice. There is an exclusive club of already established filmmakers, so breaking into it is super hard. That's why it took me three years to make my first feature-length film, *Nour*. When you decide to make a film, you go into it knowing that the odds are against you. The government can't support you, private donors are tough to come by, and you have to make it on your own. I knew it was going to be hard and that nobody would help me. I had many sleepless nights. I begged for money, and had so many rejections and people who shut the door in my face. Having my first daughter Jasmina, during the making of the film, made me persevere. When I had my second daughter, Faye, I became even more determined. I hope my next film will be much easier.

## Why tackle the subject of child marriage through the movie *Nour*?

I co-wrote it with my colleague Elissa Ayoub. I wanted to do something about forced child marriage. For me and many people I know, it is something that's unacceptable. I started to do some research, and met with dozens of women who were forced into marriage at a very early age. We made a dramatic adaptation of their stories. It was totally independent. I got grants from embassies, friends, small organizations, and eventually I took a bank loan to finish the film. I just couldn't stop. Now, it has been screened worldwide with great reviews. *Nour* will be distributed throughout France by the end of this year.

## Do you feel you have a social responsibility as a filmmaker?

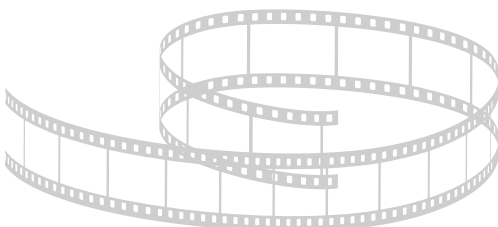
I feel it is my duty as a filmmaker to be a changemaker, especially in my society, the Lebanese society. That is why I choose these subjects. My next film will also be about human rights issues. I want my art to be about tackling and shedding light on sensitive subjects that nobody wants to handle. Unfortunately, injustice is everywhere.

I am not making my films for the box office, but at the same time I am not making them just for myself. I want to produce high-quality films, while making sure they also have mass appeal. Films have to be entertaining. I want people to enjoy and remember my stories. I want my movies to touch them in any way: anger, sorrow, happiness, sadness. I don't want the audience to feel that they have wasted their time.



“ When you decide to make a film, you go into it knowing that the odds are against you. The government can't support you, private donors are tough to come by, and you have to make it on your own.

- Khalil Dreyfus Zaarour







## LAU Giving with Tania Shaheen

“ I know how it feels to be away from home at such a young age, probably their first time away from their parents. I make them homemade Lebanese food and make sure they are connected to the Lebanese community here.

- Tania Shaheen

Since graduating with high distinction in interior design from LAU’s School of Engineering and Architecture in 1998, Tania Shaheen has been working and living in the United States. Recognizing her immense potential back then, the university had presented her with the “Best Designer Award” in her final year. In 2014, she received an honorary award from the prestigious American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) for the residential-architectural feature or element for her work on a dome in a residential house. With over 15,000 practicing interior designers, ASID is the oldest and largest organization for such artists.

Shaheen is currently based in Houston, Texas with her husband Wissam Tayssoun and their two teenage children, Asma-Maria and Alex, where she is heavily involved with the Lebanese community, chairing committees for fundraisers benefiting Lebanese causes.

Every six months, Shaheen hosts a dinner at her home for the LAU Houston Alumni Chapter. The gatherings often include LAU

PharmD students completing their four required advanced pharmacy practices at Houston Methodist Hospital and Walgreens pharmacies. Shaheen continues to plan these reunions because, she says, “I know how it feels to be away from home at such a young age, probably their first time away from their parents. I make them homemade Lebanese food and make sure they are connected to the Lebanese community here.” For her, this symbolizes the sense of kinship that she enjoyed as an LAU student. “When I was a student, the civil war had just ended, but the campus had a very positive and supportive environment. We had a sense that we were all in this together, trying to rebuild Lebanon from the rubbles.”

Shaheen’s love for LAU and her continuous support of its students stems from the fact that the university engages its alumni community long after graduation. Such attention should be reciprocated, she says, for just as “LAU looks out for her alumni, so we have to look out for LAU.”



On January 25, 2018, the Washington, D.C. Alumni Chapter of LAU gathered for Happy Hour at Myron Mixon's Pitmaster BBQ in Old Town Alexandria.



On Wednesday, March 14, 2018, the Washington D.C. Alumni Chapter of LAU partnered with JBC Events for a networking event, held at Wilson Hardware in Arlington, VA.



On Friday, March 17, 2018, the LAU Alumni Chapter of Toronto held their annual dinner at FINICIA modern Lebanese kitchen. With over 70 alumni and friends in attendance, the dinner provided excellent food, live Middle Eastern music, and a fun raffle. Seen here are past presidents Samer Andary, May Dandan Sarout, Fadi Safieddine (current president), Dina Jadaa, and Georges Ayoub.



On Friday, March 23, 2018, the LAU Alumni Chapter of Michigan welcomed Dr. Joseph Jabbra with a special dinner at the Andiamo Livonia restaurant. Pictured here with Dr. Jabbra and Ed Shiner are the chapter committee members.



On Sunday, April 29, 2018, the Washington DC Alumni Chapter of LAU held a welcome dinner for LAU President Dr. Joseph Jabbra at Lebanese Taverna in Alexandria, VA. Dr. Jabbra updated the gathering on the latest developments at LAU.



On Sunday, May 13, 2018, the Washington DC Alumni Chapter of LAU joined the American Friends of the Lebanon Mountain Trail and the House of Steep for a special Mother's Day hike through Gulf Branch Park.



On Tuesday, May 22, 2018 the LAU Alumni Houston Chapter and visiting pharmacy students got together for a delicious dinner and conversation at the home of alumna Tania Shaheen ('98) and her husband Wissam Tayssoun. This semi-annual gathering hosts LAU's pharmacy students (at Houston's Methodist Hospital) and alumni and friends for an evening of networking and socializing.



On Sunday, May 27, 2018, Members of the Ottawa Alumni Chapter of LAU brought their family and friends to the newly renovated Ottawa Art Gallery - Galerie d'art d'Ottawa. After a guided tour of the gallery, some of the group enjoyed a casual dinner and conversation at the Lone Star Texas Grill.

*If your alumni chapter has an upcoming event, please notify Ed Shiner, Director of Alumni and Special Projects, T: (+1) 646.255.1099 or E: [ed.shiner@lau.edu](mailto:ed.shiner@lau.edu)*



On Saturday, May 26, 2018, the Montreal Alumni Chapter of LAU held their Ramadan Iftar dinner at Bab Sharqi Restaurant. The Iftar dinner brought alumni and friends together for a celebration of Ramadan with good food, live music and dancing.



On Thursday, May 31, 2018, the LAU Alumni and Friends - DC Chapter commemorated the holy month of Ramadan with an Iftar dinner. Shukraan to #LVillage for hosting.



Saturday June 2, 2018 The San Francisco Alumni Chapter committee had a planning meeting at Waterfront Pizza in Foster City, California. They are planning an event for October when assistant Vice President for Alumni Relations Abdallah Al Khal will be visiting the West Coast chapters.



On Sunday, June 3, 2018 – The LAU Alumni Seattle Chapter spent the day searching for the perfect game at the TechCity Bowl and Family Fun Center. Three generations of LAU alumni enjoyed socializing together.



# Kahlil Gibran: Lebanon's Message to the World



On May 24 2018, The Center for Lebanese Heritage at the Lebanese American University (LAU), in collaboration with the Lebanese Consulate General in New York, hosted a panel discussion on Kahlil Gibran at LAU NY Academic Center in Manhattan, to celebrate the centennial commemoration of Gibran's first English book "The Madman" (NY 1918).

The event featured Henri Zoghaib, acclaimed Lebanese poet and director of the Center for Lebanese Heritage at LAU in Beirut, Dr. Philip Salem, president of the Salem Oncology Center in Houston, TX, University of Pennsylvania Professor Emeritus Roger Allen, and Dr. Helen Samhan of the Arab American Institute and Arab American National Museum.

The evening was a condensed edition of the Third International Conference on Gibran titled "Kahlil Gibran: Lebanon's Message to the World ". To date, the Center for Lebanese Heritage at LAU and the Gibran Chair for Values and Peace at the

University of Maryland have organized three international conferences on Gibran, the first two at the University of Maryland and the third in Lebanon in January of this year.

The LAU NY panel discussion was attended by Consul General of Lebanon in New York, Majdi Ramadan, as well as a number of researchers, academics and members of the local Lebanese community.

The evening was moderated by Edward Shiner, Director of Alumni and Special Projects at the Academic Center. Shiner welcomed the participants, stating that the event was a definitive example of LAU NY's mission to bridge the New York City community and Lebanon since "our esteemed Gibran is the epitome of the intellectual melding of these two cultures."

The opening remarks were delivered by the director of the Center for Lebanese Heritage Henri Zoghaib, who focused on the continuation of the University's mission to revive Lebanese heritage at home and abroad.

" The intellectual resistance is much more resilient than the military resistance.

- Henri Zoghaib

Renowned oncologist Dr. Philip Salem, focused his keynote speech on the universality of Gibran's message of love, encouraging the audience by stating "Hatred makes you smaller, love makes you bigger."

Ms. Helen Samhan read the presentation of Ms. May Rihani, Director, the Gibran Chair for Values and Peace at the University of Maryland. The piece touched on the primary influences that cultivated Gibran's literature, namely the women in his life that played a crucial role in shaping him as a man, writer, and artist. Professor Rodger Allen concluded the evening with a presentation on "Khalil Gibran and the beginnings of the Arabic Short Story."

Gibran's legacy is as relevant today as it has ever been, touching the hearts and minds of many generations, across political, religious and national boundaries. Ideas such as his transcend the tides of time, particularly those that are rife with conflict. As Poet Henri Zoghaib states, "The intellectual resistance is much more resilient than the military resistance."



(L-R) Roger Allen, Elida Jbeili, Henri Zoghaib, Edward Shiner, Dr. Philip Salem, Hon. Majdi Ramadan, and Helen Samhan



## WE ARE LAU



Erika Iverson is the associate director of the Development Office at LAU's New York Academic Center (LAU NY). She fulfills grant proposals, and raises money and awareness for student financial aid through the Annual Fund campaign. Her favorite aspects of working at LAU NY include the wonderful staff and ability to wear many hats throughout the day.

Erika graduated from Williams College with honors and went on to obtain a Master of Fine Arts from Columbia University. She has worked for many not-for-profit and arts organizations in New York, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Daryl Roth Theatre, Magis Theatre Company, and Charles Scribner's Sons.

In addition to her work at LAU, Erika co-produces a live storytelling series and podcast entitled *No, YOU Tell It!* She has directed one-woman shows at prestigious venues such as the United Solo Festival and One Woman Standing. While storytelling and directing theater projects may seem like a far cry from her career in development, Erika notes that the two pursuits feed each other nicely, as fundraising depends upon compelling stories.

This spring, Iverson interviewed several LAU students who have received either merit or need-based financial aid. By relaying their stories through social media

posts and fundraising letters, she provides present and potential supporters of the Annual Fund with tangible outcomes of their philanthropy.

Erika incorporated a similar approach into the crowdfunding effort she led in October of last year on behalf of *Courage to Fight Breast Cancer*. The program – created by LAU alumna Hiba Yazbeck (BS '97) and directed by Associate Professor and Assistant Dean of the Alice Ramez Chagoury School of Medicine Dr. Myrna Abi Abdallah-Doumit – provides funding for women from rural areas of Lebanon. Yazbeck's account of her diagnosis and striking photographs taken during her chemotherapy treatment described the origins and ongoing success of this innovative LAU program. As the first campaign of its kind undertaken by LAU North America, the team raised 252 percent of their initial goal. This provided nearly all of the funding for year two of the ambitious program.

Erika looks forward to innovating ways to spread the word about LAU's projects and programs, and raise funds for student financial aid. As a financial aid recipient herself, the Associate Director is driven by the ability to help students fulfill their dreams at LAU.



## THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT

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Dr. Saba and Mary\* Youssef  
Women's Refugee Commission, Inc.

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This list includes donors from North America who have recently supported LAU.

\* Denotes alumni donors.

## North American Alumni Tour

Assistant Vice President of Alumni Relations Abdallah Al Khal and Director of Alumni Relations and Special Projects Edward Shiner are “On the Road Again” in October 2018! They’ll visit alumni chapters in San Francisco, Seattle, Los Angeles, Florida, DC and more.

Dates and details to follow soon - check your email and Facebook.

## Upcoming Events at LAU NY

- > Global Outreach and Leadership Development (GOLD) Conference July 30 – August 3
- > Board of Trustees Semi-Annual Meeting 5 - 7 September



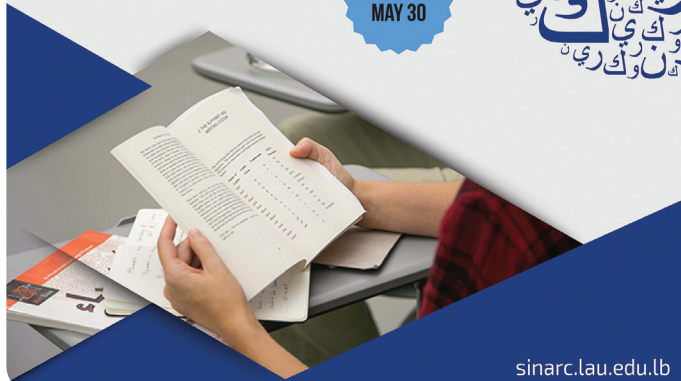
## Study Arabic this Summer in New York

from June 11 to July 20, 2018

SINARC offers courses in Arabic language and culture at all levels in the **fall, spring** and **summer** semesters at the Lebanese American University:

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MAY 30



[sinarc.lau.edu.lb](http://sinarc.lau.edu.lb)

## LAU NY ACADEMIC CALENDAR

### Courses

**September 10– December 21:**

All levels of Arabic Language Courses

For more info: [sinarc.nyc@lau.edu](mailto:sinarc.nyc@lau.edu) / 212.203.4333



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