



LAU NY Honors Zaven Kouyoumdjian

On March 23, Lebanese American University's New York Academic Center hosted a talk, book signing and reception with Lebanese television celebrity Zaven Kouyoumdjian, author of *Lebanon On Screen: The Greatest Moments of Lebanese Television and Pop Culture*. Well-known TV host Rita Zihenni led the discussion, which was co-sponsored by the Consulate General of Lebanon in New York.

Zaven Kouyoumdjian is a television celebrity, talk show host, producer and best-selling writer. He currently hosts a weekly talk show on Lebanon's Future Television titled *Bala Toul Sire*. A graduate of LAU, Kouyoumdjian is also a media consultant and lecturer at various Lebanese and Arab universities including LAU, where he is a part-time faculty member in the School of Arts and Sciences.

Preserving collective memory, *Lebanon On Screen* seeks to use the lens of television to examine the way pop culture brought the Lebanese people together and presented an image of Lebanon to the outside world. Both before and after the war, television was crucial in helping disparate groups, divided by religion, sect, or region, identify themselves as Lebanese. In Kouyoumdjian's words, "Television came to tell the Lebanese about the Lebanese."

Lebanon On Screen is a remarkable resource, filled with rare photographs that made the members of the audience gasp and murmur as they recognized famous faces. Kouyoumdjian hopes that the book can be a starting point to re-connect Lebanese people with the past and with each other. "Because of the war, there is no continuity of memory," he said. His work was inspired in part by

his own frustrated research, finding little if any published work on Lebanese pop culture, and his experiences as an adjunct faculty member. Lecturing at Lebanese colleges, he would put photos of iconic Lebanese television stars in front of undergraduates who had no recognition of their importance. "We want Lebanese media students to know about the history of Lebanese TV, not just American TV."

Ms. Zihenni pointed out that the book was already a best-seller in Lebanon, and that many young people were purchasing the book as a gift for their parents or grandparents. She noted that she still sought out clips of Lebanese television on YouTube to show her children, hoping it will "make them more Lebanese." Kouyoumdjian replied, "Or at least that it will help them understand you!" In all seriousness, Kouyoumdjian said that he hoped that families would look at the

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LAU academic center



Joseph Audi Study Abroad Scholarship student Hassan Jebai, after finishing a very successful semester at Baruch College, stopped by the LAU New York Academic Center on May 25 to visit with Vice President of University Advancement Marla Rice-Evans and to share tales of his time in New York.



On April 12, the LAU New York Academic Center in collaboration with the Consulate General of Lebanon in New York held a lecture titled “Phoenician Expedition Crossing the Atlantic.” Captain Philip Beale talked

about his upcoming expedition to prove that the Phoenicians used a sophisticated navigation system to cross the Atlantic long before Columbus. Journalist Rita Zihenni led the discussion.



On May 2, LAU’s New York Academic Center, in partnership with the Consulate General of Lebanon in New York and the New Pen League, hosted “Bridging Voices: An Evening of Poetry, Zajal, and Song.” The program included singing by Rita Zihenni, ‘oud playing by Mario Chamoun, and poetry readings by distinguished poets, including Youssef Abdel Samad, Mansour Ajami, Akram Alkatreb, Fadi Saad, and Firas Sulaiman. NPL member Wael Chehab made opening remarks.

LAU NY ACADEMIC CALENDAR

Public Events

September 27: Lecture: “Understanding Exoplanets,” by distinguished Lebanese astronomer Dr. George Helou, California Institute of Technology

October 5: Panel Discussion: “Middle East Diasporas and Foreign Policy,” with Dr. Juris Pucpenoks, Marist College

October 19: Poetry Reading by award-winning Lebanese poet Chawki Bzih

Courses

June 5 - July 28: Arabic Language Courses

For more information, please contact:

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LAU matters

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Cover Photo: Zaven Kouyoumdjian and Rita Zihenni at the LAU NY Academic Center on March 23.



Celebrating Lebanese Olive Oil

LAU’s New York Academic Center and the Consul General of Lebanon in New York, Majdi Ramadan, recently hosted a first-of-its-kind evening dedicated to celebrating Lebanese olive oil.

“The olive trees of the town of Bchaale in Lebanon, estimated to be six thousand years old, are the oldest in the world and are known as Noah’s olive trees,” said Consul Ramadan, who referred to the olive tree as a symbol of abundance and peace mentioned in heavenly books and immortalized by poets as a tree of blessing. “Even the first Olympic torch was a flaming olive branch,” Ramadan pointed out to the captivated audience.

Julie Ann Sageer, a Lebanese-American celebrity chef, author, and public television host – who is known as Julie Taboulie – delved into a full exploration of Lebanon’s olive oil landscape using all five senses. “This [event] is so special because it brings together the olive oil producers, puts the spotlight on products from our country, bridges the gap between Lebanon and America, and transports the olive oil straight here to the U.S.,” said Sageer.

Indeed, 12 oil producers and co-ops participated in the exhibition and tasting, including Altirs, J. Grove, LELO Fine Foods, Nicholas Phares & Sons, Olea Coop, Olivares, Olive Harvest,

Olive Zerta, Terroirs du Liban, Zeit Dayeetna, Zeit Zaman, and Zejd. But before inviting guests to have a taste, representatives of the producers took turns to engage the audience in short, lively, and often-humorous discussions.

LAU graduate Tania Bou Raad, who represented Zejd, told the audience that she was very proud and impressed with the efforts made by the university’s New York Academic Center to create a sense of community in the city, “with the goal of sending out positive messages about Lebanon, its people, heritage, know-how, and markets.” Bou Raad views the industry’s greatest challenge as “to be able to market [the product] to the high-end mainstream market in the U.S.,” and not just to the Lebanese diaspora in ethnic markets. “LAU NY is the ideal setting for raising awareness of Lebanese olive oil among the local community,” she said.

“Events like this bring together community members, not only to celebrate the ancient olive trees that have been cultivated since Phoenician times, but also to honor an identity and cultural heritage,” commented LAU New York Academic Center Director Lina Beydoun.

LAU alumni events



Southern California

The Southern California Alumni Chapter gathered for a garden party hosted by Leila and Richard Blackstone on April 1.



Washington, D.C.

The Washington, D.C. Alumni Chapter gathered for an Iftar dinner on June 8 at Lebanese Taverna in Arlington, Virginia.



Houston

The Houston Alumni Chapter met for Oscar Night at Simone on Sunset on February 26.



Northern California

The Northern California Alumni Chapter gathered for three lectures on enhancing life on April 29 at Tannourine Restaurant in San Mateo.

Seattle

The Seattle Alumni Chapter met for a hike at Snoqualmie Falls on April 30. After the hike the group went to the lodge in their “Attic Room” for food and socializing.



New York/New Jersey

The New York/New Jersey Alumni Chapter met for an Iftar dinner at Balade Restaurant in Manhattan on June 4.

Alumni Spotlight: Leila Blackstone and Susan Qaqunda



Not all LAU friends and graduates know about the history of the university back when it was a small women’s college, but the LAU of today owes much to its foremothers. Beirut College for Women (BCW) alumnae Susan Qaqundah (née Salib, right) and Leila Blackstone (née Khoury, left) are the backbone of the Southern California Chapter of the LAU Alumni Association.

Why did you choose to study at Beirut College for Women?

Leila Blackstone: Before it became BCW, it was American Junior College for Women (AJCW). My mother was in the second graduating class at AJCW, and her sister was in the first! When it was my turn to go to college, I never thought about other schools, not even once!

What was your experience at BCW like?

Susan Qaqundah: I had come from a British girls’ school. At BCW we didn’t have a big iron gate and a high wall protecting us from the outside – we were treated like adults. I was in the choir, and in productions of Gilbert and Sullivan musicals, and that love of music has stayed with me all my life.

LB: BCW made the students like a sisterhood. I was a Christian girl, my roommate was Muslim, and we adored each other, we still do! BCW made a point of accepting everybody, to make them a cohesive group. I was very involved in the student government and social services, and there BCW gave us an introduction into the world. The staff of the social work program were a tremendous inspiration to all of the social work graduates.

What role did your time at BCW play in influencing you?

SQ: Receiving an education at BCW was an enriching and life-changing experience. My writing training as an English major led me to fundraising, which I have done for the Philharmonic Society of Orange County and for the American Lung Association.

LB: At BCW, Lebanon provided a place for women to get a good education and to get the experience and training we needed

to become leaders in the Middle East in every profession. BCW prepared us, whether we stayed in Lebanon or went to Europe or to the US, to meet any challenges. In 1960 BCW afforded me the opportunity to attend an international conference of social workers in Ohio. There was one representative from every country, and I was chosen from BCW to represent Lebanon. I went on to a wonderful career in social services for many years.

Tell us about your relationship to LAU and the Alumni Association now!

SQ: We came here in 1967 – by 1970 I got involved in helping to bring together alumni when officials of the school would come to California. I still care about my alma mater!

LB: Probably 25 or 30 years ago I was approached, and a small but dedicated group have kept it going all these years. And it’s largely a wonderful, extremely successful group of BCW graduates. I am very proud to be a graduate of BCW.

SQ: My goodness, I am so proud of what they have done with our little college! It started as a small women’s liberal arts college, and now it is a world renowned university with a medical school, a pharmacy school, a nursing school, graduate programs. Dr. Nassar and Dr. Jabbra must be so proud of what they have accomplished.

UPCOMING ALUMNI EVENTS

July 9: Toronto Alumni Chapter Annual Breakfast in the Park

July 11: Annual Alumni Dinner in Beirut

July 13: Alumni Homecoming on Byblos Campus

July 14: Alumni Homecoming on Beirut Campus

July 16: Annual President’s Forum Brunch

July 16: New York/New Jersey Alumni Chapter Lebanese Night II

July 17: Alumni Trip to Jabal Moussa, Keserwan

August TBD: New York/New Jersey Chapter Kayaking on the Hudson

September 9: Washington, D.C. Alumni Chapter Family Picnic

September 10: Toronto Alumni Chapter Family Picnic

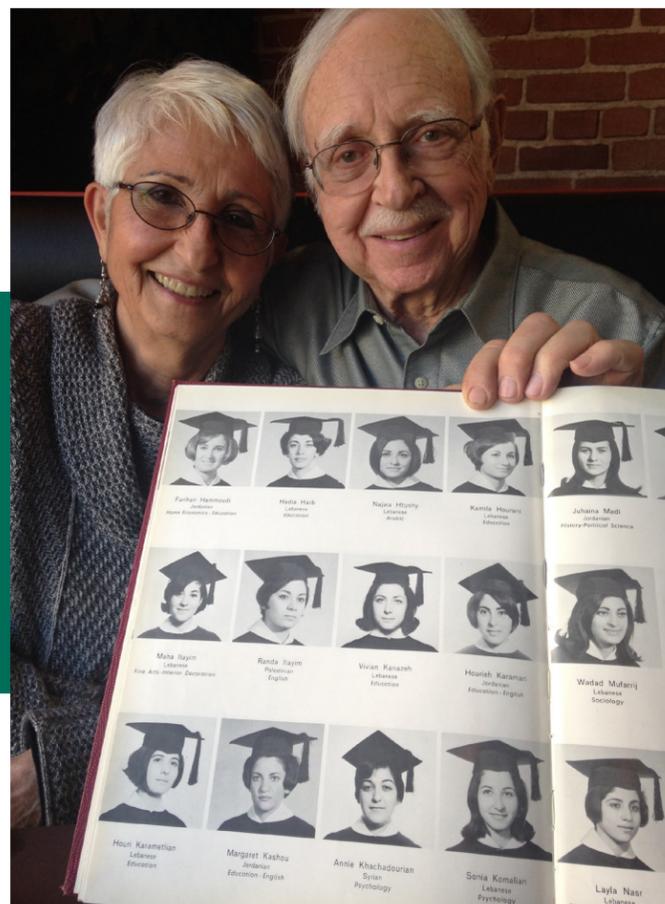
If your alumni chapter has an upcoming event, please notify:
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Dr. Sonia Konialian Aller and Dr. Wayne K. Aller “pay it forward” with groundbreaking endowment for IWSAW

Growing up in Aleppo in the 1950s and 60s, Sonia Konialian (BCW ‘66) drew inspiration from a family that valued education and excellence. When the time came for her to take the big step forward to pursue her postsecondary education, she enrolled at LAU, then the Beirut College for Women. While at BCW, she met the man who would become her husband, Dr. Wayne Aller, who was then chairing the Division of Social Sciences.

Today, Dr. Sonia Aller is a psycholinguist and a licensed Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP). She serves as Director for Communication Disorders in the University of Southern California’s LEND interdisciplinary training program at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, where she mentors future leaders in the field of developmental disabilities. For over 30 years, she has provided multilingual services to children with special needs, founding and leading non-profit organizations providing parent education and advocacy. In 2017 she received the California Speech, Language and Hearing Association’s Diversity Award. She is an enthusiastic participant in activities of the Southern California Chapter of the LAU Alumni Association.

For years Sonia and Wayne had considered establishing a scholarship at LAU. In 2016, after learning of the new M.A. Program in Interdisciplinary Gender Studies from the enthusiastic new Director of the Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW), Dr. Lina Abirafeh, its purpose and anticipated impact seemed perfect to them. Dr. Abirafeh also



spoke eloquently about how much she owed to the first Director and “founding foremother” of IWSAW, Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr, Sonia’s mentor in child development at BCW, who inspired Sonia to pursue her career helping children.

In 2017, Drs. Sonia and Wayne Aller established the first-ever scholarship endowment fund within IWSAW, the Assadour & Elize Konialian and Zabelle Bezdikian Memorial Endowment Scholarship Fund, named in honor of Sonia’s parents and grandmother, as a tribute to their unconditional love and nurturing. The fund will provide, in perpetuity, an annual scholarship award to be granted to an outstanding student, female or male, in IWSAW’s Interdisciplinary Gender Studies Masters program.

Sonia and Wayne are thrilled to support the important work done by IWSAW for women’s empowerment and gender equality, and are particularly proud of the gender studies education programming. They are honoring their ties to the BCW of the past, where Sonia’s liberal arts education prepared her superbly for her future success, and they are paving the way for LAU students who will be the leaders of the future.

Lebanon on Screen

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book together, as it might help young people reconnect to their parents and to their roots. “What is a nation? It is a collection of memories.”

During the reception and book signing, Kouyoumdjian spoke eloquently about the debt he owes to LAU and the thrill of being honored at LAU NY. “I have always felt very proud to be a part of LAU,” he said, noting that he graduated from Beirut University College (BUC) in 1992. He credits his LAU education with shaping the way he sees the world as a journalist, “always trying to ask different questions, to search for new angles.”

Consul General Majdi Ramadan was pleased by the crowd at LAU NY, joking that it had become a kind of “Lebanese Club.” The center’s director, Lina Beydoun, took the opportunity to express her gratitude to the Consul General, saying that his support made remarkable evenings like this one possible.

Speaking of the wide diversity of events offered to the Lebanese community at LAU NY, Ramadan said “I honestly cannot tell you how important this is.”



Journalist Rita Zihenni, LAU New York Academic Center Director Lina Beydoun, Author Zaven Kouyoumdjian, and Consul General Majdi Ramadan, March 23.



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Majdi Ramadan

Majdi Ramadan has been Consul General of Lebanon since June 2012, and has co-sponsored many cultural events at the Lebanese American University New York Academic Center. Prior to this appointment, he worked for ten years in New York at the United Nations.

What is your relationship to the LAU New York Academic Center?

I am an AUB grad myself, but I find myself working more with LAU because you have an amazing center here in the city—and it’s not just the center, it’s also the people—the staff is so willing and capable. Many members of our community enjoy these events. And they feature the achievements of LAU alumni!

Can you tell us about some of the more memorable events at the LAU New York Academic Center?

Honestly, they are all memorable—The wine tasting event, the food event, the discussion with Captain Philip Beale on the Phoenician ship... the Zajal event was phenomenal! I also fondly remember the FJK dance event, with Fadi Khoury—that was amazing! I believe my first event here was in October 2013, it was a talk with Dr. Philip Salem about his book “Cancer, Love and the Politics of Hope.”

What about other events in the Northeastern US?

One of the best events I helped organize here in New York was the North America

Lebanese Diaspora Energy Conference in September 2016. I take real pride in what we accomplished and especially the people that we hosted—LAU President Dr. Jabbra was one of our distinguished panelists.

You have a new addition to your family!

Yes, Alexander is almost 19 months. My wife Vanessa is my partner in all of the events that we organize. I would not have been able to do most of them without her support! She is an equal partner in all of them.