



## Celebrating the Lebanese poetry tradition Zajal in New York City

The Lebanese American University's New York Academic Center, in partnership with the Consul General of Lebanon in New York Majdi Ramadan, City Lore, and the New Pen League, presented a celebration of Zajal titled *Masters of Lebanese Zajal: Poetic Dueling in Song*, a historic performance by Zajal masters Adel Khaddaj and Dany Sfeir.

Khaddaj and Sfeir squared off in song with musical accompaniment and a chorus. The poets are esteemed *zajadis* who belong to the Union of Zajal Poets in Lebanon, as well as the Zajal Nights Choir. They have each challenged countless poets across Lebanon and on tour internationally. The hosts for the evening were Edgar Choueiri, a *zajal* aficionado who doubles as a world-renowned plasma physicist at Princeton

University; and Sheikh Youssef Abdul Samad.

Originating in 12th century Andalusia, *zajal* is a type of sung colloquial poetry, often improvised, where poets exchange mellious verbal jabs on a variety of themes in rhythm and rhyme. The performance by Khaddaj and Sfeir represents the commitment by the New Pen League to highlight the many rich poetic traditions from the Middle East, and was filmed to be part of the documentary *Poetry Duels: Improvisations from around the World*, produced by City Lore.

The improvised performance of the poets in Arabic was immensely enjoyed by the audience members, many of them part of the Lebanese diaspora, who were for a moment transported back to the Lebanon

of their memories. Sheikh Abdul Samad recaptured the evening by saying: "It was a piece of Lebanon, a piece of my culture. I felt like I was in Lebanon when I came to this LAU event."

Since 2005, the New Pen League has been conducting many cultural events in New York, Abu Dhabi, Beirut, and around the world to promote Arabic literature, culture and heritage, explained Sheikh Abdul Samad. He was therefore thrilled that LAU offered the space for the event. He said "Arabic culture needs to be part of New York City," he said. "It needs to have its own space here, and LAU can provide that space."

Steven Zeitlin, Director of City Lore explained the rationale behind the evening. "The mission of City Lore

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# LAU: Instilling global leadership skills in an increasingly isolating world

*The 2017 GOLD conference focused on youth engagement in support of sustainable development goals to tackle the global youth employment crisis.*

In an era that is witnessing gravitation toward isolationism, the Global Outreach and Leadership Development Conference (GOLD), hosted by LAU, seeks to instill in its delegates international cooperation and development skills by encouraging them to broaden their horizons. Around 35 students hailing from Lebanon, China, and the U.S., including high school students, as well as LAU undergraduates, graduates, and school advisors, arrived in New York City for the annual five-day conference on August 7.

The theme of this year's conference was “#YesforSDGs: Youth Engagement in Support of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).” A UN-engineered initiative, SDGs or Global Goals are a set of 17 goals with 169 targets that aim to end poverty, preserve the environment, and achieve peace and prosperity. The objective of the 2017 conference was to raise awareness of the various possible channels for youth engagement in support of these goals, since tackling the global youth employment crisis through investment in education and skills development forms an important component of SDGs.

“This year's GOLD links student leadership to productive employment, as it has proven that the correlation between civic engagement and potential employment is clear, concrete, and backed up by empirical evidence,” said Elie Samia, Assistant

Vice President of LAU's Outreach and Civic Engagement Office which organizes the event.

GOLD expands the training and educational development of participating delegates in the rules of procedure in a United Nations conference. During the five-day event (August 7-11) held at LAU's New York Headquarters and Academic Center—a stone's throw away from the United Nations Headquarters—the aspiring diplomats practiced their state-crafting skills in a series of Model United Nations simulation sessions. They learned the art of debate, negotiation, public speaking and conflict resolution, all while engaging in a meaningful cultural exchange.

They also had the opportunity to meet with key figures in the fields of diplomacy, international relations and youth leadership, among them Danny Kadishson, director of Economic Development at NYC Mayor's office of International Affairs; Jorge Martinez Navarrete from the UN Office of Information and Communications Technology; and Paula Boland, executive director of the UN Association of the United States of America.

Navarrete spoke to the delegates about the importance of innovation to reach the SDGs. “The new generation needs to create new ventures, companies, and organizations that use technology in creative ways and transform society so that we are able to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030,” he said. “We need new ideas that will change the market and the way society works.”





Participant Alexander Khawaja (pictured left), 22, an LAU undergraduate in Hospitality and Tourism Management currently pursuing a Master's in Air Transport Management at Cranfield University in the U.K., spoke about his experience with LAU and the Gold conference. "A lot of what I am today is thanks to what I learned from LAU. During the first few years at the university, I was shy and reserved, but after my first experience with the Lebanese NGO, MMKN, and the Model UN program, I became more engaged in the social and educational work that LAU does in Lebanon, and that drove me to push myself forward," he said.

Had it not been for his involvement in LAU's leadership programs such as Model UN, Model Arab League, and the GOLD conference, Khawaja added, he would not have gained insight into the UN, the EU and the Arab League. "The experience helped me enhance my leadership, organizational, communication and PR skills and to grow on all levels — academically, socially and psychologically."

During the closing session, Samia remarked that the GOLD conference had been "a golden opportunity for student leaders to be exposed to real practitioners in the realms of international diplomacy and civic society, with presentations centering on the SDGs and with interactive discussions about the value of social service and civic engagement."



## LAU NY ACADEMIC CALENDAR

### Courses

**September 11 – December 15:** Arabic Language Courses

## LAU matters

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### **Editorial and Design**

Elida Jbeili and Maryam Zoma

Dr. Joseph G. Jabbra, President

Elida Jbeili, Director of Communications and Media

*LAU Matters*

LAU New York Headquarters and Academic Center

211 East 46<sup>th</sup> Street

New York, NY 10017-2935

(212) 203-4333

laumatters.org

Please send all comments to: [laumatters@lau.edu.lb](mailto:laumatters@lau.edu.lb)

Cover Photo: (Left to right) Zajal Master Sheikh Youssef Abdul Samad, Adel Khaddaj and Dany Sfeir accompanied by musical guests.



# Thank you, Marla!

*Ms. Rice-Evans joined LAU as vice president for University Advancement in May 2014; under her caring leadership, the Advancement Division, which includes Development, Marketing, Communications, Public Relations, Alumni Relations, and Advancement Services, grew stronger. Ms. Rice-Evans decided to step down from her position in August 2017 after more than three years of service. We thank her for her contribution to LAU.*

**M**s. Rice-Evans was selected as the head of the University Advancement Division of LAU because of her significant wealth of experience in working for more than 30 years in advancement management at universities and other non-profits. During her time at LAU, she also served as the administrative head of LAU's New York Headquarters and Academic Center.

Ms. Rice-Evans received her master's degree in Political Science from Western Illinois University, a Teaching Certification from the University of California, Berkeley, and her B.A. from the University of Nebraska, Omaha. She served as the Associate Vice Chancellor of Advancement at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington (UNCW) and as Director of Development for International Programs at the UNCW Watson School of Education. During her tenure as Campaign Director at UNCW, Ms. Rice-Evans exceeded the goal of raising \$65 million one year in advance of its projected date, doubling both scholarships and distinguished professorships. She has previously worked in development for the Foundation for Children with AIDS in Boston, securing support from the Ryan White HIV/AIDS program and The Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation.

*LAU Matters sat down with Ms. Rice-Evans to talk about her experience working at LAU NY.*

### How did you get involved in higher education?

I was working in the non-profit sector for many years focusing on the service of others in one way or another. In terms of higher education, I was very interested in the fact that higher education is the best way to solve social ills — if people are educated and have the ability to analyze, critique, work with others, and can convey information with language, then their chances of solving big and small problems are higher. We'd have a much greater chance of living in peace and working together to reduce the drawing of lines between people. Philosophically speaking, that was, and still is, my personal principle and mission. We have a lot of social ills that needs to be tackled by smart people.

### What has LAU meant for you in these last three years?

It has meant the world to me to have been able to work at LAU and test my own assumptions — I am not Lebanese but have found out I have one percent trace Lebanese heritage. That was quite an eye-opener for me. I have bloodlines from many ancestors from all over the world, as do many other Americans, and the mix is fascinating and kind of goes to my idea that we are all in this together. LAU's leadership and staff have been some of the hardest working people I have known — they care so much and I found that to be very inspiring. They helped push me along too. In terms of personal enhancement, there have been new vistas of knowledge that I could only have learned through LAU. I was motivated to help as best as I could. LAU leadership and staff really embraced me, and we worked together to make the university better.



## Who is Marla?

I like to think of what I aspired to do here — which isn't quite your question — but I like to be the boss that I would like to have, and the boss I had in President Jabbra. I like to think that I listen more than I talk, think about things but don't think them to death, and that I try to solve problems quickly and thoughtfully so that they don't become obstacles down the road. I try to always think of others and what they face in their world, so that I can make with that an attempt or an aspiration to be as empathetic as possible. I can help them so that they can feel stronger and able to do their jobs well. We are not robots, we are human beings, and life is a convoluted path; everybody has some personal challenges and stories. It's a delicate balance to advance a step or two on a continual basis while trying to make things better. Those are the kind of things that I think about every minute of every day.

### Note that you turned a question about you into a discussion about others.

Oh, well, I am not selfless, I am not noble, I am not. I suppose that by thinking that way, it's the best way for me to feel fulfilled. I've been around for a long time and have a long way left to go.



Clockwise from bottom: 1) Marla and her husband John; 2) Marla, friend of LAU Lloyd Baroody and Shannon; 3) Erika, Marla and some of the LAU NY team; 4) Marla with Edward at the LAU NY Gala; 5) Marla and Marge at the LAU NY Gala.



"Marla leads by example with fearlessness and empathy, a rare combination. In my two years at LAU NY, I've had the privilege of working with Marla on Advancement projects large and small, and I've seen her work tirelessly to connect faculty and staff members at all levels and across LAU's campuses. She brings out the best in her team by recognizing and celebrating individual talents and allowing them to thrive, fostering an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect." **Shannon Connelly, Ph.D., Director of Development, LAU NY**



"She is that rare combination of smart, empathetic, kind, and straight-shooting that makes both a great friend and a great leader. I never doubted that she had my back, but also that she would let me know if there were areas where she thought I could improve. And when she did make recommendations for improvement, I knew that her suggestions were both for my own good and for the good of LAU." **Erika Iverson, Associate Director of Development, LAU NY**



"Marla advocated for several new approaches and changes on various levels, and I think one of her most important achievements was the consolidation of the PR and Marketing leadership into a single Assistant Vice President for Communications. She was a source of inspiration and guidance in my work with the alumni, always encouraging and pushing me in new directions. She also provided fine guidance as we collaborated on LAU's Annual New York Gala and helped promote some new ideas in PR and other areas. Her zeal and determination to make things better were soon recognized and appreciated by NY and Beirut, earning her the respect and admiration of all her colleagues. She is greatly missed and will be difficult to replace." **Edward Shiner, Director of Alumni and Special Projects, LAU NY**



"I call her the Steel Magnolia. She works harder than anyone I've ever known, and yet still makes it her mission to treat everyone with complete courtesy and respect every single day. She listens and she cares. She knows her field well from years of experience, and will share that knowledge freely and clearly. I have never felt so challenged, guided, and cared for by a manager. Truth be told, I also count her among my dear close friends. I have learned so much from Marla — about management, about life, and about appreciation. LAU is a stronger institution for her contributions, and I am a better person for her example and friendship." **Marge Pfleiderer, Executive Director of Operations, LAU NY**



# Empowering women to safeguard their lives

*An LAU alumna and a faculty member campaign against breast cancer and the stigma attached to it with C2 campaign*

When U.S.-based LAU alumna Hiba Yazbeck (B.S. '97) was diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 38 and began reading up on the disease, not only did she discover “that Lebanese women were more prone to cancer,” but remarkably that “more were being diagnosed at a younger age.” Wishing to do something positive for her countrywomen, Yazbeck reached out to her alma mater, LAU.

Yazbeck teamed up with Associate Professor and Assistant Dean at the Alice Ramez Chagoury School of Nursing, Myrna Doumit. Together, they launched “Courage to Fight Breast Cancer”

or “C2,” a program of awareness-raising sessions across the country, run by Doumit and launched with a \$12,000 donation of cash and in-kind gifts by Yazbeck and her husband Chady Wehbe. Additional major support for the program is provided by the School of Nursing, which covers the necessary course release time for Doumit to extend her work into rural areas across Lebanon.

Doumit took on the project as a volunteer because she felt she owed it to her country and Lebanese women. “I know that breast cancer is something that can be detected early,” she says, “and with early detection we have better prognosis.”

Targeting rural areas in Lebanon, the campaign holds one-hour sessions to educate women about self-care measures and early



detection. To maximize reach and attendance at the sessions — which are organized in partnership with the Ministry of Public Health — the organizers coordinate with the Ministry’s primary healthcare centers and NGOs in the targeted area to inform the community of an upcoming seminar. Through open dialogue, demonstrations of self-examination on synthetic breasts, and visuals, the talks aim to impress upon rural Lebanese women the need for constant checks, clinical breast exams, and regular mammography. “We first want to encourage the women to openly discuss breast cancer and remove the fear and stigma that surrounds it,” Doumit says.

Conducting these awareness campaigns in remote villages of Lebanon “where some women may not even have heard of a mammography, and others are too scared to have one,” is vitally important, says Fatima Beydoun, an oncology nurse who is helping with the project and who was present at a summer 2017 session held in Ablah. A couple of women present at the Ablah session near Zahlé in the Bekaa who had been carrying out regular self-examinations by copying a TV demonstration discovered that they were not doing them properly. “I wasn’t pressing on the breast as I should’ve been,” one said. “I was too scared to do so. But now I know that there’s really nothing to be scared of.” Beydoun, who has 15 years’ experience in her field, believes nurses play a vital role in educating women about caring for their health, and stressing the need for regular screenings, blood tests, and routine check-ups.

Nurses are best qualified to raise awareness, confirms Doumit, as they are the ones who interact most with customers and patients across all healthcare institutions. “Nurses with a bachelor’s degree are trained, within their educational program, to integrate patient/family teaching into their plan of care.”

Doumit notes that the response to the seminars has been very rewarding, with attendees vowing to assess themselves regularly and inform their friends about the C2 program, which aims to provide the women with constant and accessible support. “The next step is to start training the Ministry’s personnel so that the villagers can come directly to the trainer with questions and concerns,” says Yazbeck, who is collaborating with LAU NY on a ongoing crowd-sourcing campaign to make sure the program continues and expands in 2018.

You can find out more and support the C2 campaign at <http://bit.ly/Courage2Fight>

From top to bottom: 1) LAU Alumna Hiba Yazbeck ('97) during treatment, 2) Nurse Fatima Beydoun with Dr. Myrna Doumit demonstrating the correct way to do a self-breast exam, 3) Nurse Fatima Beydoun shows a young workshop participant how to check for lumps on a breast prosthesis.



# LAU alumni events

## Hitting the road with Abdallah and Ed

**A**bdallah Al Khal, Assistant VP for Alumni Relations, LAU Beirut and Ed Shiner, director of Alumni and Special Projects, LAU NY hit the road for their annual alumni chapter tour visiting seven cities in Canada and the United States by land, air, and sea.

They connected with the Boston/New England Alumni Chapter for a “Taste of Tuscany” dinner, attended a happy hour with the Montreal Alumni Chapter, shared stories at a welcome dinner with the Ottawa Alumni Chapter, and explored Manhattan’s Little Syria neighborhood on a walking tour with the New York/New Jersey Alumni Chapter. These gatherings also involved meetings with the chapter committees to discuss future plans and strategy.

On the second leg of the alumni tour, the duo traveled to Houston, Dallas, and Cleveland to reconnect with LAU alumni residing in those cities.

LAU Alumna Tania Shaheen (‘98) and her husband Wissam Tayssoun graciously hosted LAU Alumni and current Pharmacy students at their lovely home in Houston, Texas. This has become a bi-annual event for LAU’s Pharm.D. students who are doing their clinical rotations at Methodist Hospital in Houston. Dr. Ray Hachem, mentor to the LAU Pharmacy students and president of the Houston Chapter of the American Lebanese Medical Association (ALMA), presented current students Cynthia Sadaka and Remy El Hage with the ALMA-LAU Pharm.D. Designated Scholarship Grant. El Hage said that the scholarship allowed her to continue her studies as a pharmacy student in Houston and that the experience had been amazing. “I am learning a lot here and it is really lovely to be able to keep learning. LAU helped me a lot and gave me many opportunities. It is because of LAU that I am here today.”

LAU Alumnus Majed Sarieedine (‘84) and his wife Yola hosted the Dallas Alumni Chapter gathering at their spacious home in Plano. More than 40 alumni and friends enjoyed networking



and meeting fellow alumni, some for the first time thanks to this relatively new chapter, which many did not know existed. Al Khal spoke at the event urging the alumni to stay together. “We want these gatherings to continue even when we are not here,” he said. “The university will always be there for you, and I will continue to make this annual tour to offer you and other chapters our continued support. LAU doesn’t have any owners; we alumni are the collective owners. We are proud of our university and its continued advancement, and especially proud of you, our alumni, and your achievements.”

For the last stop on the alumni tour, the Ohio alumni gathered for the first time in Cleveland to discuss their future alumni chapter and to solidify the chapter in Cleveland and throughout Ohio.

Shiner said: “One of the most important and enjoyable aspects of my position at LAU is meeting and visiting with our alumni/ae. Our alumni chapters grow and develop through these personal encounters and our North American alumni 'family' is enriched immeasurably. I am always eager to visit our LAU graduates and look forward to many more opportunities to meet them, learn more about their lives, and to offer any assistance I can on behalf of their alma mater.”

The alumni chapters have grown to 43 in numbers worldwide and new chapters will continue to be established wherever LAU has a concentration of alumni. Maybe next year, Ed and Abdallah will tour your city!



## Boston



The Boston/New England Alumni Chapter of LAU gathered for a “Taste of Tuscany” dinner.

## Cleveland



The Ohio alumni gathered for the first time in Cleveland to discuss their future alumni chapter.

## Montreal



LAU alumni attended a happy hour with the Montreal Alumni Chapter.

## Ottawa



Some of the gathered participants at a dinner hosted by the Ottawa Alumni Chapter.

## New York/New Jersey



The “Little Syria” walking tour group in lower Manhattan, New York City.

## Houston



Some of the attendees at the dinner for alumni with current LAU School of Pharmacy students.



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# Robert Shafie

## Can you tell us briefly about yourself and your experience while you were an LAU student?

After completing my undergraduate (BS) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) I worked for three years in Saudi Arabia with Pan American Airlines. I came back to LAU (formerly BUC) and graduated in 1984 with an M.B.A. My wife graduated from LAU (formerly BUC) in 1974 with a B.S in Computer Sciences/Mathematics. I now have a Ph.D. in Cognitive Psychology. I enrolled in eight courses in clinical psychology and neuropsychiatry at Harvard Medical School. Currently, I work for Dr. Brown & Associates Group as a Cognitive Research Analyst and I am a member of ASCH, NESCH and PSI CHI. I am also the president of the LAU New England Chapter in Boston, Massachusetts.

## As an LAU alumnus, you have been very supportive of maintaining your relationship with LAU through the New England Alumni Chapter — tell us why your involvement with the chapter is important for you?

LAU is a continuous relationship and commitment. Graduating from LAU is not the end of this relationship. Instead, your graduation is another stage in your life, and your role is to expand this relationship beyond the scope of your individual commitment to a wider family commitment with existing and new Alumni. Our New England chapter is a healthy example which reflects the role and the purpose of LAU; one cause, one goal and one family.

## Why do you give back to LAU?

As former students and graduates, we had the privilege through

the generosity of former students and altruistic donors to get educated and build up families. In gratitude and appreciation to those who made us realize a better and brighter future for ourselves, our role now is to give back from the heart. The happiest people are those who give without expecting anything in return.

## What message would you like to convey to your fellow alumni and current students?

I strongly encourage all LAU students and alumni to remain loyal, devoted, and consistent in developing the role of the LAU alumni.

## What would you like to see LAU achieve in the near future?

Behind every success, there is a story, and when you mention LAU and its role, your imagination goes straight to the man who is still building this kingdom; LAU's President Dr. Joseph Jabbra. All that I can say is thank you and God bless you. Dr. Jabbra is an example for all the generations as a bright and shining icon who bring hope and success to this institution. Since I graduated, 33 years ago, every time I visit LAU I see a substantial improvement in the academic quality and in the building structures. LAU is steadily achieving its academic goal, and its success is reflected in the expansion of its Beirut campus, Byblos campus, and the New York Headquarters and Academic Center; which is good for all of us.

In my opinion, because Lebanon is going through critical challenges in terms of its current financial, social and demographic issues, LAU could play an essential role by employing its academic potentials and expertise to create an academic emergency team to tackle these issues.



# Celebrating the Lebanese poetry tradition *Zajal* in New York City

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is to foster New York's and America's living cultural heritage. Zajal poetry is still practiced, vital, and interesting. A big part of New York's culture are the many different ethnic groups that live here, including the Lebanese. Our intent is to continue to document these forms to make sure they get the attention that they deserve."

Sahar Muradi, Director of Poetry Programs at City Lore, described how poetry is as relevant today as it has ever been, in part due to the internet. "Everyone now feels empowered to express themselves, to post publicly, and if you are under threat you can use a pseudonym," she said, "people are even writing clandestinely. Poets such as the Persian poet Hafez from the 14th century are having a comeback online. There is even a Hafez app."

Sheikh Youssef Abdul Samad aptly encapsulated the spirit of poetry by concluding; "Poetry can never die. It keeps reinventing itself. It is in each and every one of us."



City Lore's Sahar Muradi & Steven Zeitlin, host Edgar Choueiri, Dr. Lina Beydoun, Zajal masters Dany Sfeir and Adel Khaddaj, Consul General of Lebanon Majdi Ramadan, and Sheikh Youssef Abdul Samad.

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## Introducing Peter **Moffett**

Peter Moffett is the assistant director of Development for Prospect Research at the LAU New York Academic Center. In this capacity, Peter is responsible for supporting overall New York Development Office strategy by seeking potential individual and institutional major gift donors to LAU. Before joining LAU, Peter worked as the Membership Manager at Louis Armstrong House Museum in Queens, NY, and before that, he was the Prospect Researcher for his alma mater, New England Conservatory. Peter earned his B.M. in Jazz Performance from New England Conservatory in 2010.

Although he has enjoyed a career in the world of nonprofit development, Peter's passion lies in his life as a freelance musician and music educator. Primarily

a percussionist, he has lived in New York for three years, and performs and tours with a number of musical projects. For the past two years, Peter has played with the Italian pop-based band Tredici Bacci, and remains active in at least four other musical groups in New York of varying genres and styles. He is happy to be a part of the LAU team, which is supportive of the artistic lives of its employees outside of their day jobs, as most nights are scheduled for rehearsals and gigs all over New York City.

A son of public school music teachers, Peter worked in a number of public and private schools as an adjunct instructor and percussion coach, teaching private lessons, marching band percussion, and percussion ensemble. Peter still teaches percussion, and takes part in Jazz Lab

music camp at New England Conservatory (NEC), which he has helped run since its inception in 2013. This project lies very close to his heart, as the program makes current NEC students, faculty and alumni available to high-school students of all musical levels and backgrounds for a week of musical collaboration and learning. For Peter, this serves as a yearly reminder of why he became a musician and an educator in the first place. Fostering and cultivating the musical and artistic minds of young people feels like carrying the torch that his parents, his high-school band director and percussion instructor, and his department chair at NEC passed on to him.

**LAU** matters