



Nadia Drake and George Helou.

From Black Holes to Habitable Exoplanets: Our Incredible Cosmos

The Lebanese American University (LAU), American University of Beirut (AUB), and the Consulate General of Lebanon in New York Majdi Ramadan, sponsored the event “From Black Holes to Habitable Exoplanets: Our Incredible Cosmos” at LAU NY on Wednesday, September 27, 2017 with George Helou, research professor of physics and executive director of IPAC, the NASA Infrared Astronomy Center at the California Institute of Technology (Caltech IPAC), in conversation with Nadia Drake, contributing writer at National Geographic.

Helou oversees science operations for space telescopes and for major astronomical archives for NASA and ground-based observatories. His research has ranged from cosmology to solar system objects, with special emphasis on understanding galaxies, the formation of stars out of gas and dust, and the evolution of the first generation of galaxies and quasars into today’s universe. Born in Lebanon, Helou completed his undergraduate studies in Physics at the American University of Beirut and a doctorate in Astrophysics and Radio Science from Cornell University. He has published nearly 300

articles in professional journals, and has been the president of the Academy of Sciences of Lebanon since 2014.

Helou spoke about his work overseeing science operations for space telescopes and for major astronomical archives for NASA and ground-based observatories. The audience was fascinated to learn more about exoplanets and recent discoveries made using improved infrared space telescopes.

Continued on page 11

Myriam Sfeir



LAU's New York Academic Center (LAU NY) and the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) held a free film screening of "Women in Time" on November 29, 2017 at LAU NY. The documentary, which traces the evolution of the Lebanese Women's movement in Lebanon from the late 19th century until the outbreak of the civil war in 1975, highlights the achievements of prominent Lebanese women activists who have marked the history of the movement based on archival research, historical video footage and interviews with relatives and close friends.

The film screening was followed by a Q & A with the Associate Director of IWSAW Myriam Sfeir. IWSAW at the Lebanese American University (LAU) was established in 1973 to pay tribute to LAU's origins as a girls' school and to fulfill its commitment to education, empowerment and equality for women and girls. It was the first Institute of its kind in the Arab region, and one of the first in the world.

Myriam Sfeir joined IWSAW in 1996. Previously, she served as senior managing editor of *Al-Raida*, the double-blind, peer-reviewed journal published by IWSAW since 1976. Sfeir earned her bachelor's degree in Philosophy from the American University of Beirut and her master's in Interdisciplinary Women's Studies from the University of Warwick, United Kingdom.

LAU NY sat down with Sfeir to talk about her work with IWSAW and women's rights in the Arab world.

How long have you been with IWSAW?

Over 20 years. I interned there while I was finishing my BA at AUB and then was offered to work there after graduation. I did my MA in Gender Studies and came back and started teaching at the Institute on a continuous basis since 1998.

What is unique about IWSAW?

What is really nice and unique about the Institute is that it is within an academic set-up with academic programs and it also touches on development work that enables you to work with people directly. This has been a success formula for us. We are open to working with everyone and work on things that make a difference. We want the theoretical to filter in to real life in order to have the utmost impact on society and affect change in real life.

What are the biggest challenges that gender rights activists are facing in Lebanon and the region?

Working on amendments of laws has been very slow. I think that no matter how much you have achieved, without unified personal status codes that safeguard marriage, custody, and inheritance for all Lebanese citizens it is difficult. The problem of child marriage in Lebanon, for example, goes back to the different religious courts and their rulings. Women shouldn't be at the mercy of the patriarchal and archaic religious courts. Religion in its essence is an amazing thing. It's something that

you are supposed to look up to and that brings people together, but religious laws that are often man-made put women in very disadvantaged positions.

There are so many other challenges facing women such as lack of security, gender-based violence and women's absence from politics and decision-making positions to cite a few. But I personally believe that amendments of laws and working on achieving more just laws are important. In the context of Lebanon, religion plays a huge role in your life from the moment you are born until the day you die. You are institutionalized into the sect that your father happens to belong to. This creates problems for women mostly in the context of family law.

Have you seen some progress since you started with IWSAW two decades ago?

Of course. There has been much progress everywhere. The political climate in our region has been very bloody and chaotic, but it has also created an environment for women to take to the streets and refusing to go back to what their rights were before, as seen in Tunisia and Iraq. There is also more awareness and engagement – especially by young people. They are demonstrating in the streets and being vocal. Things are happening. Change takes time, but step by step, we are moving in the right direction. We need everyone to be on board to join the fight to bring about equal human rights. Improvement is happening, there is no doubt.

How can people get involved with IWSAW?

There are many ways that people can get involved. Students are welcome to apply for internships at IWSAW and can send us information if they want to help with a lecture, research, or attend a conference. We also accept funding to help support our growth.

What are some future projects that people should be aware of?

We have a monthly lecture series called Food for Thought. We also have a partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), where we are writing a new manual that addresses women's political participation in order to simplify the process for women to get involved on all levels. We are hoping to get funding to work with women in prisons and do a sequel to the documentary *Women in Time* for the second part of the women's rights history after the Lebanese Civil War. It's important for

us to document it. Many of the pioneering women in *Women in Time* have passed away, so we need to pay tribute to them for paving the way for us.

What drives you to keep going every day?

The hope that things will get better. What drives me is that somewhere, somehow, things are changing, and I am very happy that change is happening and that we are able to witness that. I want the situation to be better for my two daughters. The more I work the better, and the more we all work collectively then the better it will be for the future generation... *Inshallah*. (laughs).



Introducing LAU Study Abroad Program's recent scholar studying in New York:

Hovig Artinian



Hovig Artinian, BS in Bioinformatics ('18), 20 years old, is the most recent recipient of the Joseph Audi Study Abroad Scholarship from The Joseph and Claude Audi Charitable Foundation for Fall 2017.

Artinian spent the fall semester studying at the New York Institute of Technology (NYIT) and lived in the

dorms while exploring New York City. Artinian immensely enjoyed his time in the study abroad program and recounted that his experience in New York opened up his mind to a different way of life, allowed him to live alone for the first time, and permitted him to excel academically while studying at a prestigious college in New York. "The experience in New York; it is very different from Lebanon. But at the same time it is not. I had this preconceived notion of America as being organized and everyone having rules that they follow, but when I came here, I realized that there was *fawda* (chaos) here too. It's like home away from home."

He continued, saying that this experience helped him realize that he can be independent and further his studies after he graduates

from LAU. "My future plan is to do my master's in Human Evolutionary Studies in the UK, Canada or the US, where you can use your bioinformatics skills in evolutionary studies," he said. "Which is exactly what I want to do. Eventually, I would like to do my PhD as well."

He expressed much gratitude for his overall experience at LAU. "I really love LAU," he said. "I applied and was accepted to both AUB and LAU, but at AUB the program was pure biology, and I knew that I didn't want to pursue pure biology as my major. I knew I was really interested in biology since tenth grade when we dove into genetics and the human body. When I found out that LAU had this new major – which is basically the part of biology where you can work with programs and acquire programming skills, I chose LAU. It has been the best experience yet. The staff and administrative staff are really friendly and approachable, and the students are the focus."

He stated further that he wanted to thank Joseph Audi for allowing him to have this experience. Receiving the scholarship was the only way Artinian could have enrolled in the program, as his father could not afford the high fees. "My dad is very pro-education because he was not able to further his education due to the Lebanese Civil War. He wanted to make sure that his children were able to go to school. He knew the importance of a good education and works very hard for me and my siblings."

In addition, he was grateful to the staff at LAU NY particularly Edward M. Shiner, director of Alumni and Special Projects, who spoke highly of Artinian, "In the short time that Hovig was in NY, I had the opportunity to share a few dinners and NYC excursions with him. He clearly embraced this opportunity with an inquisitive zeal. As a future alumnus, we are very proud of him and his excellent grades at NYIT." Artinian concluded by saying, "LAU NY has also been wonderfully supportive during my time in New York. It feels like every time I come here, it is as if I am on Lebanese territory. As if I never left Lebanon. Also, I want to thank New York for being such an amazing city. I'm going to miss it a lot."





(L-R) Vice President for Student Development and Enrollment Management. Elise Salem, SINARC officer, Micheline Saadeh, and Myriam Sfeir, associate director, Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW).

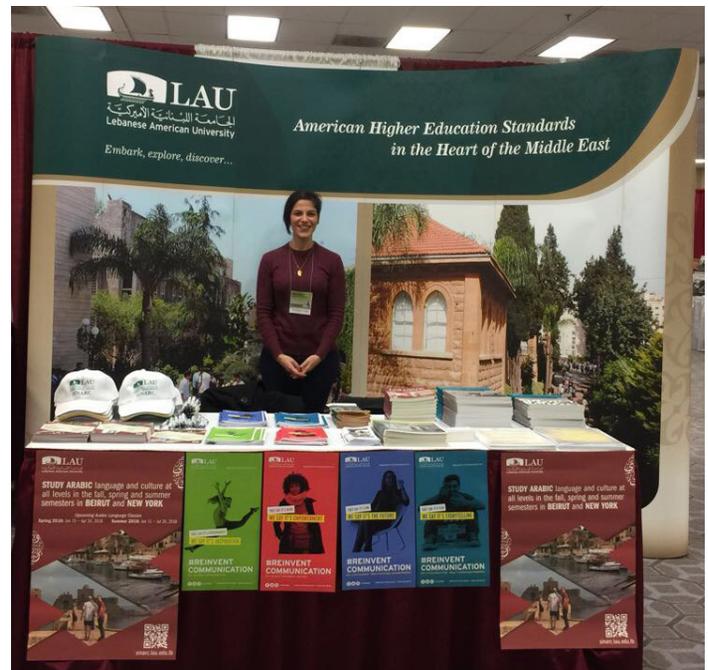
LAU and SINARC shine at the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) Conference in Washington DC

By Sarah I. Shedeed

The Middle East Studies Association (MESA) Conference brings together academics of the Middle East to partake in a weekend of knowledge exchange. This year, the conference was hosted in Washington, DC, where educators and students alike contributed to the ongoing discourses surrounding politics, refugees, gender issues, the economy, and identities of the Arab world. LAU NY was represented at MESA by Student Services Assistant Sarah Shedeed, who coordinates the SINARC Arabic Language program in NY. She and Micheline Saadeh of SINARC Beirut connected with students and educators from around the US and Middle East to promote the program. SINARC hopes to expand its global presence and engage in meaningful partnerships to bring more people in touch with the Arabic language and culture of Lebanon.

LAU also organized a panel discussion, entitled “Reflections on the State and Statelessness in the Post-Arab Spring Era.” On this panel, Imad Salamey, director of the Institute for Social Justice and Conflict Resolution (ISJCR), presented his paper, “The rise of communitarian states in the Middle East.” Additionally, Sami Baroudi, assistant professor of political science presented a paper entitled “The problematic notion of the ‘Islamic State’ in the discourses of contemporary Islamists.” Other members of

the panel included representatives of AUB, Lund University and Tufts University; the discussions among the professors as well as with the audience were lively, informative and innovative. LAU has proved, once again, that the strides it is making in academic discourse are impacting practices in the Arab World.



Sarah I. Shedeed, Student Services assistant, LAU NY, at the LAU booth at MESA.



LAU represented at a historic Arab-American Summit

*By Erika Iverson,
Associate Director of Development, LAU NY*

In November 2017, I represented LAU at MOVE 2017: An Arab American Summit to Advance Social Change. MOVE stands for Mobilize, Organize, Vocalize, Empower and the conference was a first-of-its-kind event that took place in Dearborn, Michigan on November 16-18. More than 500 participants from across the country participated in conversations about a wide range of issues that impact Arab Americans.

Over the course of the conference, there were workshop sessions covering the arts, activism, philanthropy, organizational development, and youth empowerment. It was remarkable to see

the variety of attendees: young activists in jeans and sweatshirts mixing with philanthropists in heels and business suits.

The theme of “Leading Through Challenging Times” was encapsulated by Maha Freij, deputy executive director & chief financial officer of ACCESS, as well as creator of the Center for Arab American Philanthropy. She spoke in the opening plenary session of setting positive intentions to achieve goals. “It is more powerful to say ‘I am for justice’ than ‘I am against injustice.’”

In a speech closing the conference, “Paying Tribute and Moving Forward,” Freij spoke movingly of her personal and professional relationships with two giants in the worlds of philanthropy,

the arts, and advocacy: Russell J. Ebeid and Jack G. Shaheen. Overcome with emotion during her tribute, Freij paused as she remembered the projects Ebeid helped her reach/accomplish, including the naming and dedication of the Arab American National Museum's Russell J. Ebeid Library & Resource Center. "The contagious energy was easily felt throughout the conference," Freij reflected in the November ACCESS Update.

The conference came at an exciting time for me, as the New York Development Team completed a successful month-long crowdfunding effort for the LAU Courage to Fight Breast Cancer (C2) Program created by alumna Hiba Yazbeck. Upon arriving at MOVE, I was intrigued by a two-part workshop, modeled in part after the popular American television show *Shark Tank*. The first class was a thorough tutorial in "Preparing a Successful Elevator Pitch" from Manal Fakhoury, president and CEO of Fakhoury Leadership International. The following day, participants were given the opportunity to develop and practice making a "pitch" to a panel of philanthropists including George Ellenbogen, Noha El Shareif, and LAU Health Foundation Board of Trustee member Manal Saab. Since I could clearly present the need for C2 funding, I chose to make my pitch on behalf of the program. Looking out at an audience of important philanthropists made me more nervous than I initially expected, but I was able to overcome my anxiety and make my presentation. I was happy to note that it sparked a great conversation among the panelists, with several audience members asking for more information after the class.

Representing LAU at the MOVE Conference was a true honor and I learned how to better support the educational programs and scholarships offered at LAU. I returned to LAU NY Academic Center more confident in my abilities and with a renewed faith in the importance of LAU's work educating future leaders in Lebanon, the Levant, and the world. I look forward to continuing to learn from and contribute on behalf of LAU for a long time to come.



From top to bottom: 1) Far left - Erika Iverson at the MOVE conference. 2) Maha Freij, deputy executive director & chief financial officer of ACCESS. 3) Opening Plenary session at the Dearborn Inn in Michigan.. 4) Shark Tank panelists L-R: Manal Saab, Noha El Shareif and George Ellenbogen.



Save the Date

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NY Athletic Club

6th Annual

Gala

LAU New York



Join us as we celebrate
with our honorees



Mrs. Aida Sharabati-Shawwaf – humanitarian and founding member of the Kayany Foundation, which builds and operates schools for Syrian refugee children in Lebanon. Mrs. Shawwaf is a strong advocate for women’s education in the Middle East. She helped establish Effat University, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia —the first liberal arts college for women in the Kingdom. Mrs. Shawwaf has served as a member of the Advisory Board for the Lebanese American University’s Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World.



Honorable Majdi Ramadan – Consul General for Lebanon in New York, whose exemplary commitment and service to the Lebanese community of Northeastern USA and especially to the New York Metropolitan area continues to be an inspiration. As Consul General, Hon. Ramadan, the official representative of the Lebanese government, has assisted and served the Lebanese community through extensive outreach, interaction and promotion of all events related to the Lebanese diaspora of Northeastern USA. Hon. Ramadan has been a great friend and supporter of LAU NY.

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LAU NY ACADEMIC CALENDAR

Courses

September 11 – December 15: Arabic Language Courses

LAU matters

LAU Matters is published quarterly by the New York Headquarters and Academic Center of the Lebanese American University and distributed free of charge to alumni, friends and supporters of the university in North America.

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Washington DC



November 30, 2017, the AUB, LAU, IC Washington DC Alumni chapters launched their first-ever “Holiday Celebration” at Maggiano’s Little Italy at Tysons Galleria. More than 100 people attended the celebration, which also featured musical performances from Huda Asfour and Kamyar Arsani.

New York/New Jersey



December 2, 2017, LAU New York/New Jersey Alumni Chapter kicked off the holiday season with their annual holiday party at Casa La Femme. Dozens of alumni and their families and friends gathered to fraternize and enjoy the traditional Egyptian cuisine.

UPCOMING ALUMNI EVENTS

January 25: Washington DC Chapter Happy Hour

March 11: Montreal Chapter Happy Hour

March 15-16: Board of Trustees Meeting in Beirut

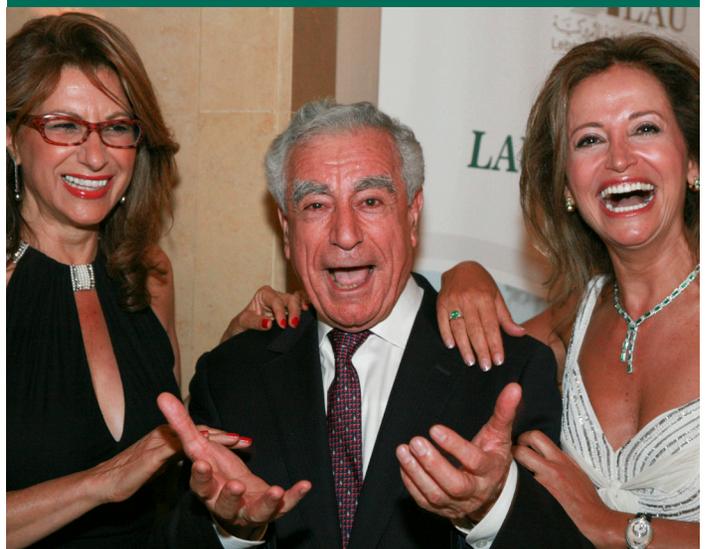
March 17: Toronto Chapter Annual Dinner

March 23: Detroit Chapter Dinner

The following chapters have events coming up with dates to be confirmed: Boston/New England, New York/New Jersey, Washington DC, Cleveland, Northern California, Seattle, Montreal, and Ottawa

If your alumni chapter has an upcoming event, please notify:
Ed Shiner, Director of Alumni and Special Projects
(646) 255-1099, ed.shiner@lau.edu

Coming Soon: LAU NY Gala



LAU giving

Clockwise from top: 1) Approximately 80-100 people register to attend the annual picnic on the Lake Ontario Waterfront in Mississauga. Photo from June 2015. 2) L-R: Past and current presidents of LAU Toronto Alumni Chapter Samer Andary, Georges Ayoub, Dina Jadaa, May Sarout, Ed Shiner (Director of Alumni and Special Project), and Fadi Allos. 3) Some of the attendees at the Annual Picnic from September



Toronto Alumni Chapter

LAU's Toronto Alumni Chapter is arguably one of the best organized and most active chapters in North America. Its members host successful events throughout the year which fundraise thousands of dollars in support of much-needed scholarships for LAU students.

According to the current chapter President Dina Jadaa ('87), "One of the major things that I am proud of about our chapter is our ability to reach out to our alumni and get together at least three times a year. Those social events are fun and helpful in many ways that allow networking: Some people found jobs, others found better places to live and others even got married because of these events. But the most important thing that keeps me involved is that all proceeds from the events go back to Lebanon to the financial office to help students financially."

Georges Ayoub ('90), immediate past president, who served from 2012 until 2015, explained that much of the success of the chapter lies in the fact that the division of tasks and delegation between each committee member is very clear and everyone

takes responsibility for their assignments. He stated that "the benefit is that we are united and work as one hand. We even socialize outside of LAU events. Many of the same people will get together regardless." He added that they always welcome new members to help the chapter continue to reinvigorate itself.

Edward Shiner, director of Alumni and Special Projects at LAU NY spoke highly of the chapter: "From my first encounter with this chapter in 2007, I was impressed with their zeal and organizational annual planning of events. I continue to use them as a model for other chapters because they had small and simple beginnings, but have grown and succeeded due to good leadership, determination and commitment. It CAN be done! Mabrouk, Toronto!"

Ayoub concluded, "LAU has helped foster the spirit of the Lebanese community in the diaspora and helped us maintain a connection with our roots in Lebanon. We wish LAU even more success in the future and we are very proud of LAU students. That is why we give back."

From Black Holes to Habitable Exoplanets

Continued from page 1

Helou's presentation was then followed by a Q & A discussion with the audience that was moderated by Drake.

When asked by Drake why astronomy is important, Helou replied that "Astronomy and all science is a universal aspiration of humanity because it helps us put earth, life on earth, and our solar system into a greater context." He went on to say that he hoped the next generation of youth growing up in Lebanon who are gazing up at the sky will be inspired to pursue careers in science because the future of any healthy society is to have "a strong education system and strong scientific thought system."



George Helou took questions after the discussion from a captivated audience.

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Shannon Connelly



As Director of Development at LAU's New York Headquarters and Academic Center (LAU NY) since October 2015, Shannon Connelly oversees individual giving, institutional giving, and donor relations efforts for LAU in North America. Shannon brings to LAU NY more than a decade of experience in the nonprofit sector, with a focus on fundraising and program development for museums and universities. She also brings a love of the arts and a taste for Levantine cooking!

Before joining LAU NY in her current role, Shannon served LAU for several years as a freelance development consultant while completing her graduate studies in art history. Previously, she worked as a grants writer and prospect researcher for organizations including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Columbia University, and the Museum of the City of New York.

Shannon received her PhD in art history from Rutgers University and her BA from New York University. At Rutgers, her research focused on art and politics in early 20th century Germany, and

her dissertation examined a group of left-leaning artists who studied in the southwestern city of Karlsruhe before World War I. As Director of Development at LAU NY, she works to advance programs and projects across LAU's campuses, from the School of Architecture and Design to the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW). During her tenure, she has collaborated with faculty, staff, and administrative partners across LAU's campuses to raise more than \$1.5 million in gifts and grants to advance LAU's mission; developed with colleagues at the Institute for Social Justice and Conflict Resolution (ISJCR) and IWSAW a competitive application to secure LAU's first multiyear grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York; and led the LAU NY Development

team in partnership with LAU's alumna and donor, Hiba Yazbeck, to raise over \$25,000 through a first-ever 30-day crowdfunding campaign for the Courage to Fight Breast Cancer program at LAU's Alice Ramez Chagoury School of Nursing (ARCSON).

Born in Lititz, Pennsylvania, Shannon has lived in New York for nearly 20 years – with the exception of two years spent in Germany for her doctoral research. She is married to Stephen, a geophysicist who recently began a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Texas in El Paso.

LAU matters