

# The Initiative To Educate Afghan Women

## NEWS & Events

### From the Founder

This spring we can all celebrate since we have aided in the education of 47 Afghan women including eight who graduated from five U.S. colleges.

Each year, the IEAW boards and staff marvel at the strength of these women. They have been schooled previously in secret classrooms and/or as refugees in Pakistan. The students never wrote a research paper until they came here. Education had been memorization-based in the past.

Walking around their campuses at night is a new experience for the women. At home, they are in the house at night, or if they go out, they must be accompanied by a man. Studying in the library late and then walking back to their dorm with a friend is all new. They all do so well academically, even when fasting during the month of Ramadan. I am also proud how they represent their country and religion when speaking to students and groups. The IEAW was meant to be a cultural exchange. The program is certainly sticking to its mission.

Another new experience is participating in study groups with men and having conversations with them on campus.

I recall one woman saying she was surprised that men have so many similarities to women. The only men they typically get to know back home are fathers and brothers. The students will be in arranged marriages so they do not date, but they are getting to know men as friends.

Suffice to say, it has been a pleasure and an honor meeting and educating these women from Afghanistan.

This year was challenging for the IEAW. Like all nonprofits and businesses, our concern was maintaining and expanding our efforts even during this grave financial time. I asked our board and advisory board to give more time to the IEAW so we could continue to succeed and even dream of educating more Afghan women. Debbie Wiley and Drue Gensler, our board co-chairs, worked nonstop to keep us in good speed. It is hard to imagine how many hours they volunteered to galvanize the board and evaluate all of the IEAW policies, procedures and infrastructure. We are so much better off because of these two women and the board members who gave extra time.

I also thank donors like Doris, Debbie, Drue, Nina, Priscilla and others who gave more financially in these lean times because they believe in educating Afghan women and have confidence in the IEAW. Please, everyone, give more if you can. We are giving hope to the people of Afghanistan by educating their women.

Inshallah, we will succeed today, and even expand to allow more Afghan women the right to earn a college degree from our generous and educationally advanced country, the USA.

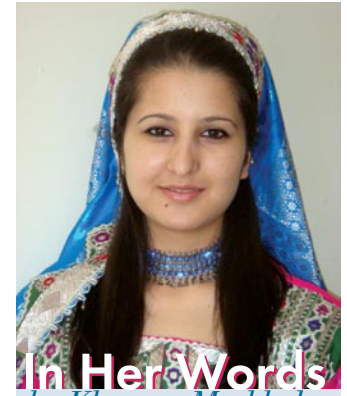
Enjoy the light of summer.



*Please continue to help us educate the women of Afghanistan and give the extra card to a friend.*



IEAW Board and Students



### In Her Words by Khatera Merkhel

I appreciate the IEAW and Meredith College for providing me with this higher education opportunity.

Back home, strict alienation and vicious assumptions, such as women are “inappropriate” or “incapable” of working in social, political, or economic spheres, have convinced many Afghan women that we are unable to participate in the development of our country. By having equal opportunities, I feel women will be better-suited leaders at home.

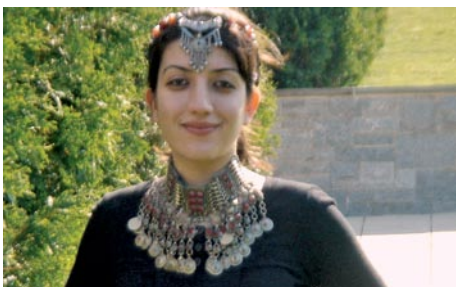
I plan to be an advocate and role model for Afghan women. Leadership is my goal.



### Graduations

Sadiqa, Malalay, Muska, Zohra, Saghar, Rabia, Dewa and Alean graduated from college this year, class of 2009! They attended these very generous and caring schools: Mt. Holyoke, Middlebury, Roger Williams University, Old Dominion and Kennesaw. All of the women did very well in their studies and looked radiant at their graduations. Muska even read from the Qur’an at hers. Having come from Afghanistan with the dream of higher education, they are now part of their country’s hope for the future. Education opens minds and hearts. These women have learned that education is the key to a fulfilling and successful life. As well, they have learned that positive relationships with people around the world are possible and pretty wonderful. One of the best times of year for the IEAW is now when we can see the smiling and proud faces of our students as they march at graduation. The hope and knowledge they now have will be shared with their families and people at home.

## IEAW Students Honored



Zohra, Middlebury college graduate, was the recipient this year of the Dean of the College Award. She also received the Barbara Buchanan '62 Memorial Prize for community outreach and involvement and her thesis was nominated for the Gensler award.

Zohra was also the President of the Islamic Society on campus at Middlebury college. One of her highest goals was to find common grounds with other religious groups on campus. She also was founder of Women and Global Peace, creating awareness of women's issues on campus. Five of her friends also worked on the organization. They raised money to help women in war torn Iraq and Afghanistan. In her first year of college Zohra and students organized the "Remember Afghanistan Symposium." It was a successful event.



Sadiqa, Mt. Holyoke College graduate, received two important awards this year. The Samuel Huntington Public Service Award honored Sadiqa with \$10,000 for the Implement Youth Capacity Building Initiative. Sadiqa is the founder of YCBI. It will offer a curriculum tailored to the needs of 1,000 male and female high school students (primarily Grades 11 and 12), and build their active leadership skills. This project will reach a group of engaged students who require a more focused curriculum to enhance their learning and leadership skills so they become active members of society, starting when they are students.

Sadiqa also received the Presidential Leadership Award which honors Sadiqa's work in Afghanistan and her academic life at Mt. Holyoke.



Alean, who this year received her graduate degree from Kennesaw, was granted the Outstanding Student Award. "Each academic year, the International Student Association, under the auspices of the Kennesaw State University Office of International Student Retention Services, sponsors an International Award and Recognition Ceremony. As part of the process, the executive board of the International Student Association seeks nominees from the Study Abroad office. Ms. Alean Haider, MPA '09 graduate, was the well-deserved recipient of a 2009 award for her extraordinary work with Kennesaw State University study abroad programs."

## SOLA *By Nilab*

There could be no better name for the Afghan club at the University of Mary Washington than SOLA, which means "peace" in both Dari and Pashto (two of the languages spoken in Afghanistan). SOLA is an acronym for Student Organization for Learning about Afghanistan, where Afghans and Americans can come together in peace and harmony to learn about the culture and traditions of the diverse country that is Afghanistan. These students hope to foster peace and mutual understanding.

SOLA will be coordinating educational events, like film screenings and guest speakers, and social events, like dinners and national dance, for members to learn and take part in Afghani culture and traditions.

During my freshman year, I received a lot of questions from students and faculty wondering about our culture. Their interest in learning about the Afghan culture inspired

me to create SOLA. I wanted my classmates and friends to taste the goodness of our culture instead of only the negative aspects such as terrorism and violence in Afghanistan that are present in the media. It is a great pleasure to share the Afghan culture with other cultures and see a lot of similarities. Educational programs such as the IEAW bring hearts and minds together to build bridges between people from different cultural backgrounds.



At the beginning, I was not sure how many students would be interested in becoming members. Eventually it turned out to be great and we have 103 members and several American students and faculty who volunteer to help with club endeavors.

Membership in SOLA shall be open to any interested undergraduate students at the University of Mary Washington. UMW graduate students and UMW faculty/administrators may join the club as "Associate Members."

So far we have been part of multicultural fare fashion show where we showed our traditional male and female dresses and exhibition in which SOLA displayed Afghani embroidered products.

*Check out the great new articles from Mary Washington Magazine and others at [ieaw.org/news/](http://ieaw.org/news/)!*

## Board Members' Event

On April 27, 40 women gathered at a coffee hosted by Board Members Dottie Woodcock and Susan Crudgington. They watched the film created for the IEAW by Nina Richardson which describes the underlying mission of the organization and heard remarks by Nadima Sahar, Nujiba and Mursal. The guests learned that the Initiative's ultimate goal is to educate Afghan women so that they return to Afghanistan, a country that does not have a lot of college-educated women, and help work towards reconstruction. Additionally, the attendees were impressed to hear that the students return home each summer to financially and emotionally support their families and remain bonded to their country. Ultimately, the IEAW is bridging the gap between two countries that need



to get to know each other better on a more human level. The guests were so impressed by these young women who answered questions about their courses of study, their lives on college campus and at home in Afghanistan.

This was one of Nadima's last visits before she leaves for home. She is truly a terrific spokeswoman for this program as



she is poised, articulate and gracious. Nujiba and Mursal generously gave up precious final exam studying time to attend the gathering. The guests were amazed at their fantastic speaking abilities and their enthusiasm for their studies.

Those who attended were impressed by the women and learned more about the underlying mission of the IEAW.

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## New York Gathering

On March 23, the IEAW hosted a fundraiser in New York City at Afghan Kebab House. It was a good time had by all. The restaurant looks very similar to how an eatery would look in Afghanistan. The food was especially good and very similar to what the students eat at home. Debbie Wiley, co-chair of the board, sponsored the event by treating us all to the meal. Karen and Everett Cook, also on the board, provided the wine. This was especially kind of them so that the proceeds could go directly to the IEAW.

Three students and the director spoke about the IEAW and also about the status of Afghanistan today and its women. We also played the IEAW video which shows the commitment the students have to their studies and their appreciation for this opportunity in the United States. Two of the students are engaged so they talked personally about their matched relationships, their fiancés, and the level of equality that they see in their marriage. Both women told their husbands that they expect an equal relationship with mutual respect. The students are marrying well-educated men who will encourage these women to aim high with their goals.

There were discussions about the elections in Afghanistan this summer and the hope that the new president will be a well-educated, strong, visionary leader. The students and director are hopeful and optimistic that this new president will make a difference in their country.





## *IEAW visits Kent Place School*

On April 20, the IEAW enjoyed a nice opportunity to talk with students at Kent Place School in New Jersey for their Global Perspectives Day. We were welcomed by a student that took good care of us during our visit to this impressive school. We were given a tour of the middle school where we spoke and heard from this student about her recent trip to Kenya with the school, and how it opened her world perspective. She took us to the classroom where we conducted two seminars: one to a seventh grade group and the other to an enthusiastic sixth grade class. After we spoke about the IEAW and Nadima talked about her country, Afghanistan, the students asked many questions that showed their interest in the discussion. They wanted to know about the people, the foods, the

life of women, and more. Nadima told them about what her life will be like at home when she returns for good in May. There were many questions about how she will spend her time at home. They were interested to hear that she will work and take driving, violin, and art classes in the next three years.

We were treated to lunch by the school and taken there by our warm hostess. Many of her friends gathered to have lunch with us. We discussed our time at the school and more about Nadima, me, and also the ice cream that was served that day! It was a good cultural exchange for all.

Thank you to Karen Rezach, Director of the Middle School, for inviting us.

## **Maryam Attends Computer Conference** *By Maryam*

The Grace Hopper Conference was such a great opportunity to meet other women in computing and engineering from around the world. More than 1,300 women from all over the country and some from abroad attended the conference. I was given the opportunity to be part of a group of eight women from Montclair State University, including both computer science department faculty and students.

“The Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing” is a conference that helps women each year. Women leaders in research, industry, academia, and government present their work with focus on the role of women in computer science, research, technology, and engineering.

I met with some of the best women computer scientists such as Elaine Weyuker who won the 2008 Anita Borg Technical Leadership Award. Her achievements are very impressive. Though it is unfortunate that the number of women in computer science is marginal relative to the number of men in this field, women can be strong role models encouraging other women to join this exciting field of study.

This conference not only reminded me of the important role that technology plays in our lives, but also encouraged me to

consider bold new goals. Before coming to the United States, I was a computer programmer. I always wanted to be more than that and learn more about computers. The IEAW has been one of the powerful forces in my life and is helping me achieve my goals. And this conference let me discover what that “more” exactly meant to me. I want to be a computer scientist, not only because I want to build tools and new ways of doing things that help others solve problems, but also because I find intrinsic values in these endeavors. I have chosen this difficult path because it is challenging. By nature, I find joy in challenges, and achieving goals that initially look difficult. So, on the road to becoming a computer scientist, I have begun to focus more on mathematics. I am also becoming involved in research projects with my professors who have been very helpful and encouraging.

After finishing my studies in the US, I want to be in a position that, even with the shortcomings in Afghanistan, I manage to make discoveries in computer science at home. Of course, my bigger goal is to help men and women of my country be part of these discoveries made around the world, not just witnesses to such discoveries.

Attending this conference has been one of the most memorable experiences of my life. I am now inspired to set new, higher life goals.



Elaine Weyuker of AT&T Labs and Maryam



Montclair State University computer science department faculty, other students and Maryam

## *The National Model UN Conference* By Wazhma



Apart from learning day-to-day lessons in classrooms, I was fortunate enough to attend National Model United Nations (NMUN) 2009 conference and to present the Republic of Finland. The conference is the largest and one of the most prestigious

collegiate Model United Nations programs in the world. It is the world's largest, university-level UN simulation. There were 2,500 students from 300 universities and 28 countries attending this conference. The opening and closing ceremonies were held in the General Assembly Hall in the United Nations' headquarters. The opening ceremony was a wonderful experience. We heard two speakers; one was the Under-Secretary General for Communications and Public Information, H.E. Kiyotaka Akasaka. The next speaker we heard was a retired U.S. ambassador, H.E. Lynn Pascoe, who is currently serving as the Under-Secretary General of Political Affairs. They both had wonderful words for delegates. Mr. Pascoe even joked about diplomacy as he said "Diplomacy is the art of telling someone where to go in such a way that they look forward to their journey."

Unlike most of the other classes, the other 19 delegates and I prepared for this class from the beginning of the winter break to April 4th, when we headed to New York City for the conference. Four months of preparation, writing papers and

knowing about Finland and the African Development Bank were an amount of work that I never expected I could handle in addition to my other courses. But our delegation was very fortunate to have Dr. Jennifer Abbassi as the faculty advisor who used to visit us late at night in the computer labs and treat us to pizza, soda, snacks and some motivational words to keep us energized.

During the conference, acting as a Finish ambassador, and caucusing with different states were the parts I liked the most. Also, having a picture of how the UN works was another stunning experience for me. Attending this conference helped me understand the world from a different perspective, widening my view of the world. I have learned how to relate the theories I learn in every class to the real world examples. Also, I believe this experience will help me in my future career when I go back home after my graduation and serve my country.

After one week of conference, we headed back to school even more excited than when we had left because our delegation achieved two awards - Best Position Paper and Honorable Mention for delegation performance. What can be a better opportunity than to build new skills, learn diplomacy, present a state, get to know different students, and bring back honor to your school!

The involvement and commitment of our 20 colleges is what helps make the IEAW a successful mission. Together we are educating the first professional work force in Afghanistan in 40 years. We thank all the colleges for this generous gift of education for Afghan women.

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## **Huma in the Courtroom** By Huma

Sweet Briar is a small liberal art school located in western Virginia consisting of 600 students. We have many courses related to law and society but we have not had a Moot Court course in the history of Sweet Briar. In 2008, the school was funded to have a Moot Court course. Not enough students registered for it so it failed as a class, however my co-counsel and I were the only ones who really wanted to proceed with the Moot Court. We prepared for three months before we participated in the Regional at California State University in Los Angeles. We were given a case and we had to make the best argument we possibly could with strong legal reasoning in three months

while other teams had prepared for the whole year. We did not know what side we would have to argue until entering the courtroom so we had to be prepared to the best of our ability for both sides in order to compete against the opposite teams.

Thirty-six different colleges and universities around the state had participated at Regional on the 4th and 5th of December, 2008. My co-counsel and I did the best we could in this Moot Court with our three months of preparation since most colleges had practiced for a whole year as a class and had competed before in other Moot Court cases. We were judged, questioned and given comments by judges who



were well experienced in the field. As an Afghan, and English not being my first language, I achieved a great success just by participating in a Moot Court case last year. This course made me committed to earning my graduate degree in Law and becoming a successful lawyer for my country, Afghanistan. I am grateful to the IEAW for helping me reach toward my goal of becoming a lawyer.

# Commencement 2009



1. Alean with Michelle and co-workers
2. Kind and giving Peggy, with Alean
3. Saghar glows on her graduation day
4. Rabia with family

5. Dewa and friends
6. Dewa with her younger friends
7. Zohra with her two best friends
8. Zohra and her American mom

9. Muska and host mom Michelle
10. Alicia with Muska and Benafsha
11. Malalay and Sadiqa standing proudly with Kay, Carolyn and Alicia
12. Oh happy day!

## Participating Colleges

Brenau University in Georgia  
 Bryn Mawr College in Philadelphia  
 College of the Holy Cross in Massachusetts  
 Juniata College in Pennsylvania  
 Kennesaw State University in Georgia  
 Meredith College in North Carolina  
 Middlebury College in Vermont  
 Montclair State University in New Jersey  
 Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts  
 Old Dominion University in Virginia

Ramapo College in New Jersey  
 Randolph College in Virginia  
 Roger Williams University in Rhode Island  
 Simmons College in Massachusetts  
 St. Mary's College in Maryland  
 Sweet Briar College in Virginia  
 Tuft's University in Massachusetts  
 University of Mary Washington in Virginia  
 University of Montana in Missoula  
 University of Richmond in Virginia

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