

The Initiative To Educate Afghan Women

NEWS & Events

From the Founder

This time of year is always very exciting for all of us associated with the IEAW. We all know that the women have returned to their colleges and will be closer to their goal of returning back to Afghanistan with a degree in hand. Nice to know that degree is from U.S. colleges and people who care so much about these deserving women. One has to think how courageous they are to travel from home to the U.S. without ever having left their country before. They come to us with a dependency on home and family since that is the plight of women in Afghanistan. Independent living skills and a heightened sense of self are gifts that these women inherit as the result of this program.



Four freshman and four sophomores
in Kabul, Afghanistan, summer 2008

We must be realistic and know that relations between our parts of the world are not at an all time high. There has circulated too much misinformation about both the U.S. and Afghanistan, politically and culturally. That is why the mantra of the IEAW is to, yes, educate the women of Afghanistan. A goal which is equal to that of education is bridging the gap between two countries and different parts of the world that desperately need to learn who we all really are. This lesson of learning about one another is done with great respect by all, as we live together and know our souls different than the media portrays. Pushing change on cultures and people does not work. Respecting and learning about each other's differences and similarities is a much better way to go.

We welcome to our circle this year two new colleges. They also understand the value of this cross-cultural exchange. Welcome and thanks to St. Mary's in Maryland and Mt. Holyoke in Massachusetts. I always proudly say that not every college is accepted into this program. What is asked of the IEAW schools is that they go above and beyond in

welcoming these women and watching them closely throughout their four years. They are from war-torn Afghanistan. These women have lived many more years beyond their chronological age of much hardship, repression and displacement. Let us see that they have four years of peace and welcome so they may go home each summer educated and refreshed. These two colleges fit into our requirements, if you will. We all thank them very much for being the top schools that they are and desiring to give the best gift to help Afghanistan, namely educating Afghan women.

Soon, Alicia and I will hit the road and visit all of our students. We go together for the first part of the year and then separately for each student's second visit from us. When we visit the colleges we meet with everyone who has direct care of the women, which includes the Presidents, Deans, dorm officials, international folks and more. We have one large meeting with all present so we can all work instinctively to better serve these women. After meetings, the best part comes when we spend time with the students sitting and chatting in their dorm rooms and then sharing a meal together. Some of the women have cooking facilities, so home-style Afghan cooking is what we hope we'll have for dinner!

The religious holiday of Ramadan begins early this year in September. The women will then need to eat their first meal in the middle of the night. We will make sure that every college stocks their dorm refrigerator with morning foods and provides a place on campus for them to pray. Ramadan is a time to cleanse and go inward to evaluate self and learn a deeper respect for others. This year, let us all join in the Ramadan celebration even if we are not Islamic. No need to fast. Yes, there is a need to search for deeper understanding.

Many thanks, once again, to everyone supporting these dear women. We are doing this together, giving and getting so much more.

Warm wishes. Peace to all.

Paula



In Her Words by Yalda Fajeerzada

I am very excited and thankful to the IEAW and Holy Cross for giving me this opportunity to make my dreams of education come true. I always wanted to study in the U.S. This program will give me more options in my life back home, and will teach me about other nations and cultures. I also look forward to sharing information about my country with my classmates and teachers. Studying in the United States will help me concentrate in a peaceful environment, without any fear of being kidnapped, threatened or being a victim of a suicide bombing which is on the rise in Afghanistan.

The situation of women at home is very different from that in most other countries of the world. In most families in Afghanistan the birth of a female causes shame, not happiness, and they think the girl will be a burden to the family. My goal is to get a good education and help end the suffering of Afghan women. With a solid education I can serve my country, my people, remove stereotypes and build a greater respect for women and their rights in Afghanistan.

Yalda is a freshman at Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass.



Commencement 2008

In May we proudly attended the graduations of Arezo and Nadima, who received their graduate degrees from UMass Amherst, and Adela and Palwasha, Simmons College success stories. All four of these women were at the top of their class with earned cumulative GPAs of 3.5 and above. Adela's mother, widowed and mother of four, attended her daughter's big day. Arezo had her mother and father with her for graduation. The students helped to fund their parents travel just so they could attend these very important days in the lives of their families.

Nadima graduated as one of the youngest in the entire graduate school since she came to the U.S. at age sixteen for college. She spoke often for the IEAW during her entire college experience. Arezo received her undergraduate degree in three years and completed her final semester with nine classes! She received A's in all of them and had the highest grades for all of her five years of college.

Adela graduated with a triple major and received three distinguished awards at her graduation. She was honored at graduation for her outstanding contribution to the Simmons community. The political science department acknowledged that Adela completed outstanding work in exceptional service to their department. The international relation department honored Adela for completing outstanding and exceptional service to that major.

Adela was schooled in the basement and lived in Afghanistan during the Taliban time, rarely able to leave her home for five years. She had the following to say about her educational experience:

"Studying at Simmons College was a rewarding experience both academically and socially. Although it was difficult to leave my family behind and come this far to study, it made me an independent person. During my experience I was able to make important decisions about my life, such as choosing a major, making plans for my future and thinking on a more mature level. Additionally, I was able to learn about different cultures and be open to various thoughts and ideas. From this experience I was able to see that



no matter how different people are because of their culture, language and religion, ultimately we all want peace, prosperity and happiness. I am happy and proud to be an ambassador for my country and work towards eliminating the misconceptions that exist in both Afghanistan and the United States."

The IEAW is so very proud of all four of these exceptional women.



Fundraiser

Last year, Pricilla Wong heard the IEAW director and four students speak at South Ferry Church in Rhode Island. After listening to the women's inspirational stories, which highlighted their hardship, determination and resiliency, Ms. Wong offered and was eager to have a fundraiser in her hometown of Darien.

In June, approximately 35 women from the Darien area attended the luncheon fundraiser that was held in Ms. Wong's home. Those who attended were impressed by the women and learned more about the underlying mission of the IEAW. The women learned that the Initiative's ultimate goal is to educate these Afghan women so 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 counties that need to get to know each other better on a more humanistic level.

The IEAW thanks Ms. Wong's efforts to raise enough money to partially pay for a student to attend a university this upcoming year.



From a Mother

As a mother, I am deeply appreciative of the opportunity that the IEAW is providing our Afghan daughters. They are finally getting the education we all longed for. I am profoundly grateful to all of you for taking the best care of our daughters since they are studying so far away from home and family.

For a parent, it is hard to imagine his/her child living an independent life away from home, in particular an Asian/ Afghan parent. However, this program has helped us gain confidence in our daughters and to know their strengths for living their lives independently, and coping with their problems by themselves. Today I have trust in Tahmina's strength, which gives me the confidence to send her back to the U.S. for her second academic year. My husband and Tahmina's brothers and sisters are very proud of Tahmina and thankful to everyone there in the U.S. who is supporting her.

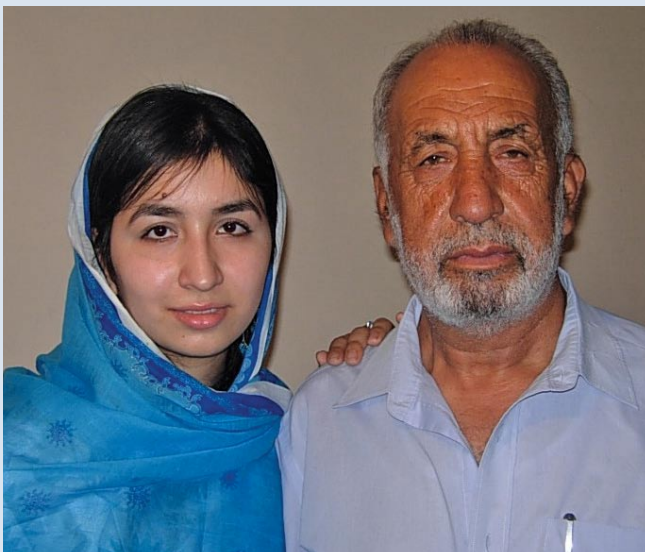
I wish a lot of success and strength for all of the children of my country, those who are enjoying such great educational opportunities at the moment, and also those who will gain access to it in the future.



Now our hearts are filled with hope of a better future for our country, today, looking at the inevitable progress of our children.

From a Father

As the father of Wazhma, we would like to thank the IEAW and all of its supporters for making our dreams come true by sponsoring Wazhma to study in the United States. I always dreamed of sending my daughters to school and to help them be as independent as my sons. Due to the civil war in Afghanistan, we fled the country and lived in Pakistan as



refugees. I did not lose hope and supported my daughters' education in Pakistan, but they could not continue their higher education due to the collapse of the universities in Peshawar by the government of Pakistan.

Wazhma is not frustrated anymore. With the support of great people like you, she is now going to school and does not want to think about her life in Pakistan any longer. Today, Wazhma smiles, and has the courage and motivation to go ahead. We are hopeful for her and our country's future. This is all because she has been given the chance for higher education and pursuing her dream of being a woman leader. I am very sure that Wazhma's education in the United States will not only make her a strong woman, but will also have a direct effect on her nation and country. I am very proud of my daughter. We are very proud of Wazhma. She will be an asset to our family and country when she returns after graduation.

Thank you once again for all your support and kindness to our daughter, and all the other Afghan women involved in this program. You are really doing a terrific job.

Wazhma Furmuli is a sophomore this year at Randolph College.

Women's Campaign School at Yale

By Nadia Sabar

The Women's Campaign School, held at Yale University from July 16–20, was a “national and international, non-partisan, issue-neutral leadership program.” The goal of the Campaign School was to “increase the number and influence of women in elected and appointed governmental and political positions” by providing the best political leadership and campaign training for women who want to run for office or move up to higher elective office.



Nadima, Sister Arlene Violet and Miss Rhode Island 2006 Allison Rogers.

There were a total of 52 participants representing twelve countries, including Bangladesh, Jordan, Egypt, Burma, Saint Kitts and many others.

During the five days, our sessions consisted of a “full, rigorous and intensive study of candidate and campaign management training” where we took part in intensive political immersion program that taught us “political skills, strategies, assessment and communication.”

In addition to teaching us political leadership, skills and strategies, the Campaign School also provided us with the opportunity to increase our networking opportunities and to have an intellectual exchange.

I am grateful to the IEAW and to Sister Arlene Violet for their generosity in sponsoring me to attend the Women's Campaign School. My experience at the Women's Campaign School helped further instill in me the importance of achievement: setting goals, following through, believing in oneself, selfless sacrifice, integrity and always leading! It was truly an honor to be part of this group and, as the purpose was to inspire, I stand to report that I was not only inspired but also encouraged and empowered to weather the challenges ahead with a sense of purpose and collaboration in order to achieve the unified goal of making this world a better place for all of its inhabitants. I truly and deeply thank you!

Freshman Summer ESL Class

Although this year's cohort of incoming IEAW freshmen have each scored very high on their English Proficiency Exams, they can still be challenged by the expectations of academic writing in the U.S. The writing styles vary widely between eastern and western countries, and to ease the transition, the IEAW provided Intensive ESL (English as a Second Language) Writing Classes to two incoming freshmen. The classes were taught by IEAW Coordinator Alicia Baucom, and included instruction on grammar and planning, organizing, writing and revising academic papers. Special emphasis was given to teaching self-editing strategies so that the students could begin to recognize and edit their own mistakes and make necessary revisions. By the end of the two weeks, both students were well on their way to writing solid academic papers.

Summer Jobs

Helay: I found my return very productive during this summer. I was recruited as Network Administration Officer to upgrade and replace obsolete network setup at USAID. Among the main duties, I developed and led a technical team, full design installation, engineering, implementation, support, training, administration and management authority for: LAN Network Services, data center computer operations, application systems, internet operations, database administration and vendor and distributor relations/communication.



I spearheaded the transition from outdated organization-wide and departmental technologies to highly functional, streamlined and cost effective client server technologies and business solutions and optimized data integrity and safety.

I would like to mention, my studies at U.S. have boosted up my knowledge and strengthened my professional as well as academic career. I am happy I shared my knowledge in my homeland and became an active member to serve it. I am looking forward to completing my higher studies inshallah.

Thank you IEAW !

Khadija: Working for Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM) unit as a national consultant was a great summer experience for me. This unit aims to assist the WFP Afghanistan Country Office (CO) to effectively address emerging issues such as continued high food prices, constraints on commercial food imports and poor cereals harvest in year 2008. During the three months I was able to absorb a great deal of information about Afghanistan's food situation and at the same time I assisted the



VAM Unit in the analysis of a diverse set of data that could be used to better target beneficiaries for food assistance in both urban and rural areas of Afghanistan. This was a magnificent experience for me and will help me in the future in the analysis of my own projects at school.

Benafsha: I worked as the Victim Assistance Program Administrative Assistant with Clear Path International. CPI is an international NGO and sub-contractor for DynCorp International, the primary contractor to the U.S. Department of Weapons Removal and Abatement.



I assisted the CPI country representative that works for the WRA Victim Assistance Program. This program includes ongoing activities and support for Afghan NGOs assisting people with disabilities. Many of the victims were harmed by mines. My job duties included office work, translation, attending meetings, report writing and financial data input.

My education in the U.S. has helped me create new ideas in the work place, find different solutions to problems and I now feel more professional and able to work with partners in business.

Huma: I had studied Finance and Administration for two years at Preston Business Course in Kabul, and had worked for

two years in the same field before going to the U.S. as a freshman this year. After attending Sweetbriar College this past year I decided to change my major to Law and International Affairs since I had more choices. I wanted to do an internship this summer in Kabul so I could give myself another experience in the finance field. I knew that my summer work would help me answer what my college major will be. I really like working at AUAF. People are very nice and my work place was pleasant. I am glad that I tried finance again to know that my change in major is right for my future.



My family and I believe that I can be a better lawyer for Afghanistan than a Finance Minister at this time.

Waznma: I used to work with the American University of Afghanistan as a Finance Officer before I went to the United States last year as a freshman. When I returned home this summer, AUAF welcomed me back as Summer Finance Specialist. Working with AUAF was an amazing experience this summer because I joined the same office but I am educated now and have more knowledge than I had before. My one year at Randolph College helped me support AUAF in different areas. For instance, the two economics classes and the two business



classes gave me the potential to look at their financial system from a different and larger perspective. I have been able to give them constructive financial feedback.

Also, during my one year in the United States, I became familiar with the flow of financial work in the U.S., which helped me to draft a Student Financial Manual for AUAF's students. My work with the development office at Randolph College this past year and my success as a fundraiser there was also a benefit that I incorporated into my work this summer

Khatera, Salma and Sweeta worked at Afghan Center for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research (ACSOR) during summer vacation in Kabul. The firm is a joint venture between the American company D3 Systems and the Bulgarian company BBSS. ACSOR is a market research agency, which has conducted qualitative and quantitative research projects for international and national clients such as ABC News, the Asia Foundation, U.S. State Department and various Afghan government ministries.



During their internship they assisted with different activities, including overseeing the work of interviewers by conducting field missions, translating the questionnaires in English, entering data into databases, coding the questionnaires and attending the capacity building trainings.

It was a great experience for all of them to learn the basics of research and survey in a friendly environment. They are happy that they could contribute and exchange information with colleagues at ACSOR. Khatera, Salma and Sweeta thank the leadership of ACSOR for providing this opportunity.

The IEAW worked with ACSOR during the year to match a few students to their company needs.

My Experience as a Student

By Nadia Sahar

I was born and raised in a country where only 30 percent of the girls have access to education and 87 percent of the girls are illiterate. It is a country where the lives of hundreds of thousands of Afghan women and children have been shattered in the human rights catastrophe that has devastated Afghanistan for the past 23 years. Armed groups have not only massacred defenseless women in their homes, but have also brutally beaten or taken them as wives. While some committed suicide, thousands of other Afghan women, including me, fled with our families to Pakistan in order to avoid such a fate.

Although as a young woman I survived a childhood of war and violence, it never filled me with a sense of despair and hopelessness. Instead, it convinced me that education is the only way to bring a positive and constructive change to Afghanistan. Since then I had a new purpose and a new dream in my life: a dream of completing my higher education; A dream that was always running ahead of me and to catch up, to live for a moment in unison with that dream, was the miracle.

That miracle first happened in my life when I received a full four-year scholarship from the Initiative to Educate Afghan Women. Through this scholarship, I was able to study at Roger Williams University in Bristol, Rhode Island, and graduate with a degree in political science, philosophy and business management in May of 2006. Using my degree, I worked with International Medical Corps, a non-profit organization, in the summer of 2006, in order to build a dental clinic for orphans in Kabul, Afghanistan.

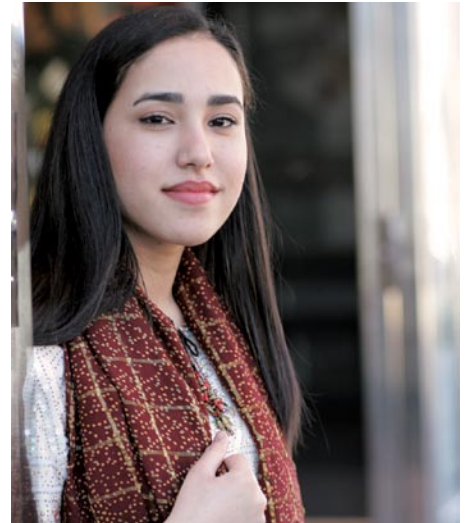
That miracle happened for a second time in my life when I received a scholarship from PEO International Peace Scholarship in September of 2006. This scholarship was instrumental not only in getting me to the University of Massachusetts where I got my masters in Public Policy and Administration, but also in preparing me to help my countrymen and women by working as an

assistant at the Women's Rights Section of Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission this past summer. As a part of my job, I was responsible for promoting women's rights in Afghanistan by raising awareness about them and by participating in calls for stronger efforts to counter violence against women. I achieved these goals by involving men in communities, sensitizing police officers and providing support for victims. I also regularly mediated family cases and monitored prisons and hospitals in order to assess women's conditions there and any cases of violence against them.

My experience at the Women's Rights Section of Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission helped me understand that, although the political and cultural position of Afghan women has improved substantially since the fall of the Taliban, there are many challenges that still remain. The repression of women is still prevalent in rural areas where many families still restrict their own daughters, wives and sisters from participation in public life and the only way to change their situation is to have women actively participate in the decision-making process. I hope to participate in that process one day by becoming the first female president of my country. And, since women are an essential part of the solution for the future of Afghanistan, I hope to be able one day to promote the leadership of women in the planning and governing of Afghanistan, increase and monitor the provision of emergency and reconstruction assistance to them, and support the Afghan Ministry for Women's Affairs and Afghan women-led non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Although this path is hard and full of obstacles, I have learned how to cope and how to be a reborn woman: free, independent and whole.

Today I feel humbled but also empowered to go forth and pursue great challenges in an effort to better our world. Of course, I owe this experience and all of the



consequential emotions and inspiration to IEAW and its supporters. It is IEAW's generosity that has allowed me and the other students to experience and understand greatness. Thank you so much for investing in me and for opening the eyes of so many eager young women to a world they never dreamed possible. As long as I live I will treasure this time and this great gift that IEAW has given to all of us. A new me was born from this experience, one refilled with hope and awe and inspiration.

Contributions are received
through our web site at
www.ieaw.org.

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