

# The Initiative To Educate Afghan Women

## NEWS & Events

### From the Founder

Greetings to all IEAW supporters during this very joyous and giving time of year.

I want to share with you a letter I received during Thanksgiving from Wazhma, a freshman at Randolph College.



Wazhma

“Today I want to send special thanks to you and other Americans who are providing this opportunity for me to study in the United States. While being so busy with my classes, I always try to encourage and help my siblings, friends and colleagues who are at home. They want to improve their English, especially essay writing. As a result, they write short essays and send them to me not only to edit but also so I can teach them the different methodologies that I am learning every day here in college. Since I had enough time last night, I edited three essays and found that they have been able to improve their English a lot since the time they sent me their first papers. Today, all of them are not just coming to me for help with English writing, but they also ask advice with personal problems or issues they are facing in their offices. They are so thankful to me, but really I believe you all are the group

of people we should be thanking. Just a few months of study in the U.S. have both helped me, my siblings, friends and colleagues at home. I know I am still in the foundation stages of college learning, and I need to work a lot more to be someone who can help a larger group of people. I just see it as my responsibility to share my new knowledge with everyone. Thank you for giving me this ultimate opportunity.”

Many of our students wrote letters of thanks. These students love learning and see college as a dream come true. We have all made college a reality for the 42 women currently in this program and the 10 graduates. I guess we are doing the right thing!

This year has gone relatively smoothly with the program growing by one third. The students have been immersed in study and meeting fellow students, joining clubs and getting used to life in the U.S. I am amazed once again by how quickly these women adjust to such rigorous schedules and a completely new life.

One big change in administration happened this fall with the announcement that Margie would be moving to Africa with her husband to work for the Clinton Project. She will be missed by all and surely will give needed help to those people in her homeland. Our new coordinator is Alicia Baucom. She has a degree in social work and a passion for educating Afghan women. For many years Alicia was looking for the opportunity to help improve the lives of Afghan women. She met our two students at Meredith College and knew she wanted to get very involved in the IEAW mission. Well, now she is. Alicia is a very passionate, bright, creative, energetic person who will certainly help advance this program.

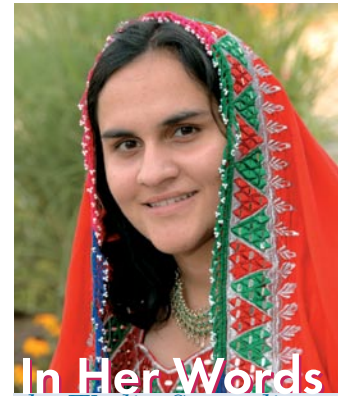
More good news is that Adela Raz graduated from Simmons College in December and has joined the IEAW team until she begins graduate school in the fall. You may recall that Adela is a triple major and has about a 3.9 average. We could not have a better representative for the IEAW.

Many thanks once again to Doris Buffett for helping to bring this year's 17 students to our U.S. colleges.

Wishing everyone a peace-filled new year.

Sincerely,

Paula



### In Her Words by Wadia Samadi

Very few Afghan girls are fortunate to seek education abroad, and I am one of them. Today I am a student in one of the finest colleges around the world, and this would not have been possible without the support of IEAW. After the downfall of Taliban, the world community brought many changes in Afghanistan; however, nobody paid attention to the education of Afghan women. IEAW took this step and opened the road to education to many Afghan women.

IEAW has awakened the potential of Afghan women to achieve their goals and gain recognition around the globe. Once receiving their degrees, the IEAW women will return to their country with the hope to spread the light of love and education around Afghanistan. They will revolutionize Afghanistan by proving that women have the capability to bring development and prosperity.

Many thanks to University of Richmond for accepting me and providing me with a first-class education.



Coordinator Alicia Baucom

# New Villages

Each year new campus “villages” join the Initiative to Educate Afghan Women. This year we were joined by Bryn Mawr, Sweet Briar, Mary Washington and Ramapo. It is always a pleasure to work with our new school representatives, each committed to giving our students the extra care that is needed for these young women from war-torn Afghanistan. In addition to our new colleges, Mount Holyoke took two additional students, Montclair State one, Juniata three, Randolph College one, Richmond one, Meredith one, Brenau one, Kennesaw State one. We are very thankful to all of these schools that

have opened their arms even wider, welcoming more IEAW students. This year we had a first-time educational gift by a mosque near Ramapo College. They heard that Shaima was to attend but funds were needed. The Jerrahi Order of America is a Sufi order that has been sponsoring a number of education projects in Afghanistan and Bosnia. They believe that education is the most effective way of bringing the people a better future. They are paying Shaima’s room and board for the four years. We are all very impressed with this mosque’s generosity and commitment.



- 1. Brenau President Dr. Ed Schrader
- 2. Brenau staff with students
- 3. Mary Washington Acting President Rick Hurley
- 4. Mosque members
- 5. Ramapo President Dr. Peter Mercer and staff
- 6. Sweet Briar students
- 7. Montclair State staff
- 8. Mount Holyoke staff

Here are three quotes from administrators at one of our model schools, Mount Holyoke:

**Joanne V. Creighton, President:**  
 “We have been delighted to be part of the Initiative to Educate Afghan Women. The Afghan students who have come to Mount Holyoke have been truly remarkable. They have brought so much to our community, and we know they will do great things upon their return to their home country. Along with Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen, we believe that “few subjects match the social significance of women’s education in the contemporary world.” When women are educated, all of society benefits—whether in terms of economic productivity, public health or an engaged citizenry. IEAW allows us to turn this rhetoric into reality; it represents what higher education can and should be doing to make a profound difference in the world.”

**Donna Van Handle, Dean of International Students:**  
 “Educated women are more likely to understand their rights, participate in community or national politics and initiate action for social change. Our IEAW students from Afghanistan have taken full advantage of the many opportunities, both academic and otherwise, available to them at Mount Holyoke. Therefore, I have no doubt that they will assume important leadership roles and advocate strongly for the rights of women when they return to Afghanistan following graduation.”

**Kay Althoff, Director, Frances Perkins Program:**  
 “We have had the good fortune of getting to know women from a part of the world we only hear about and see through the media. Assisting these bright women in claiming their education is the right thing to do.”

# Sweeta's Story



I was very young when my family left everything that they had in Afghanistan and left to live in Pakistan because of the Taliban regime. We faced really hard times in Pakistan since we did not have anything. My father and brother took any work they could get to provide us with food. It happened many times that my father and mother skipped lunch and dinner to feed us. We rented a house right in front of an elementary school. I could not attend

because I was not able to pay the fee. I was really interested in studying, so I was there every day standing and looking at the students from our window.

Finally, I made some money by making paper packets and selling them to dry fruit shops. I educated myself until grade four by borrowing books from one of the teachers at the school. After I earned enough money I took the entrance test for grade four, paid the tuition and began my education. I did very well in school and graduated first position in grade 12. The school gave me a gold medal.

We went back to Afghanistan after the Taliban collapsed. I started working as a translator and then was promoted to project assistant and office manager. I was the sole support for my parents and four brothers and sisters.

I was really interested to do my higher education but due to economic reasons I was not able to. I was not telling my family that I loved and wanted to study because I did not want them to get upset since they were unable to afford college. I always had somewhere in my heart a hope that one day an angel would come and make my dream come true. I see my angel of heart in the IEAW. From the first day that I saw the announcement I was feeling that I was going to see my dream come true.

When I was called for an interview, that was the happiest day of my life. I love this program because there is no corruption. Anyone who needs and is interested in education can get it. The best thing is that knowing all the risks the program director herself goes to Kabul every year to interview candidates. Therefore, this program really means a lot in my life.

I am a freshman. Sometimes I think I am still dreaming, but it is true and I am so happy. I am trying my best to get as much education as I can to be able to help my country.

## Eid Celebrations

### 1. Geety Shams

"It was a bright day and the beginning of the happy festival of Eid. The four Afghan students from both Brenau and Kennesaw were invited to a gorgeous dinner by Peggy Arrington and her friends. They made the day special for us by not letting us be alone. Normally at home in Afghanistan we always have lots of family and friends that we celebrate with. We in a heartfelt way thank Peggy and her friends for giving us their company and support, trying to fill the gap we have in not being near family on the important day of Eid." (Peggy Arrington is a longtime IEAW supporter from South Carolina. She has invited students many times to her home and has gone to their campuses to give some motherly/friendly care.)

### 2. Saghar Baqeri

"We spent the first day of Eid with friends from our campus. This was a group of people from all around the world. It meant a lot to us to spend this special day together. We were invited to our friend's aunt's house who is from Bangladesh. The food and company were great!"

### 3. Zohra Safi

"This year I am co-president of the Islamic Society of Middlebury College. With the help of the board members and support of the other Islamic society members we organized a gigantic dinner for students fasting and invited our friends, host families and some members of the Middlebury community. Eid is one of the biggest feasts back home and people celebrate it with great enthusiasm and joy. This year we wanted to make our Eid celebration special for many students at Middlebury who are far from home. We also wanted to educate Americans and other students about Muslim culture and rituals. These are little things happening on our campus, but they are very enriching and inspiring. It shows that in a foreign country like the U.S. you have every right to celebrate and consider yourself part of this larger community."



# Students Speak Out

*Afghan Hospitality by Malalay Waziri*



At the beginning of October, 16 Afghan professors came to the U.S. They came as part of a four-week program offered by Amherst. When Sadiqa and I heard about them we decided to invite them over to our campus for lunch before they returned to Afghanistan. During our conversation we touched on so many issues, such as security in Afghanistan, life in the U.S. and the American education system.

We gave them a tour of our campus. They asked us how it was for us adjusting to a completely different and diverse culture and if we had full support of our professors. Indeed, we have been treated very well at Mount Holyoke. Everything about this college is impressive and unforgettable. Our professors as well as staff members never made us feel that we came from a different culture. They are very supportive, sympathetic and caring.

In Afghanistan, hospitality is a cherished tradition. It is considered an essential aspect in the Afghan code of honor. Being an Afghan, one should respect and welcome his/her guests, especially when they are strangers or have no family or friends in that country. An Afghan's good reputation is, in part, associated with the generosity she expresses toward visitors. Though we did not have our own homes to welcome the professors, it was necessary to make them feel welcomed and valued at our college. They should be respected anywhere they travel since they are the deferential educationalists of the next generation of wounded Afghanistan.

To conclude, Afghan hospitality is not just an offering or a smile, nor is an invite for a visit. Instead it is a real wish or desire to see another person welcomed and wanting to have him/her come back for more. They took a lot of good memories of us with them to Afghanistan. We wanted to prove to the professors that we have not forgotten our tradition and our people. We will always remain Afghan no matter where we go.

*Representing Panama by Razma Qadir*

In October I went to Washington, D.C., sent by Juniata College as a part of their United Nations program. I was vice president and Panama was the country I was representing at this high school conference. The topics discussed were use of torture in the war on terror, Chinese humanitarian crisis and Zimbabwe.

Though I had a great interest in international relations from my school times, undoubtedly this interest became my passion when I joined Juniata College this year. I came to know that there are available opportunities like different clubs, community services and associations to enrich my studies. Model United Nations is one of the subjects that embraced my area of study. My program of emphasis is international peace and conflict studies with a secondary concentration on economics. For acquiring full proficiency in this field I needed to concentrate on subjects that discuss the relations of the countries on an international level.

The Model United Nations attracted me due to its high importance. It helped me to know the world status in the U.N., research topics and debate on the role of humanitarian concerns on the world stage. It helps me know causes of war, the conflicts and its prevention to avoid bloodshed and develop peace in the world. These debates and attempts to resolve them built up my intellectual qualities. The MUN helped me to know the parliamentary procedures and prepared me for official conferences in the future. It built up my confidence, trained me to deal with diplomacy and foreign affairs. I gained lots of new information about different countries' stance at the United Nations. Attending this conference helped me know and practice real diplomacy and international affairs.

As co-chair, working on draft resolutions and judging the ideas of students made me an independent decision maker.



*International Peace Convention Speaker  
by Nadima Sahar*

In September I was invited to speak at The International Peace Convention in Minnesota this year. It was attended by 3,800 people. I spoke about my scholarship that I received for my graduate education by the P.E.O. International Scholarship Fund. They assist women from other countries to obtain advanced degrees from universities in the U.S. and Canada and then take the knowledge back to their own countries to share with their people. Arezo and I were the first recipients from Afghanistan since 1949.

During the event I talked about my interactions with P.E.O. members and how P.E.O.'s assistance has helped me reach my educational goals. I was able to meet trustees of the International Peace Scholarship Fund: Ms. Brenda Atchison, Ms. Sue Baker and Ms. Ann Conway, the executive office staff and some other recipients.

It was an honor to be a part of the convention and I truly enjoyed meeting everyone. This organization's generosity has allowed me to experience and understand greatness. As long as I live I will treasure this time and this great experience that the International Peace Convention has given me. A new me was born from the experience. One filled with hope, awe and inspiration. P.E.O. has encouraged so many of us to make the world a better place, and for that I could never thank everyone enough for this honor.

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Contributions are received  
through our web site at  
[www.ieaw.org](http://www.ieaw.org).

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regarding the Initiative should  
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