

The Initiative To Educate Afghan Women

NEWS & Events

From the Founder

May is the time for graduations. This year we will proudly be attending the ceremonies of Nadima and Arezo who are receiving their graduate degrees from UMass Amherst. Palwasha and Adela will complete their studies at Simmons College. All four of these women have excelled in college and have also gone after the cultural exchange aspect of this program. They have spoken to many groups and connected with students and the folks working on their campuses. I have heard repeatedly that these women will be missed on their campuses because they have added good feeling and thought to the people around them. The women feel so very grateful for the opportunities that they have been given by Simmons and UMass, both of which offer a first-class learning environment. Their minds have been opened forever to people around the world. Sounds like the IEAW mission of quality education and caring cultural exchange has been met! We will attend these graduations with other IEAW board members and supporters. This is a “we” effort. Many people have been touched by the lives of these four young women. We are educating them together and will joyously watch them in cap and gown receive their golden opportunity college degrees.

All of the IEAW students are preparing for exams and the completion of another year of college. They are also yearning for their summer at home with their families. This is a very exciting time of year for these women, who know that soon they will be with their loved ones in their dear Afghanistan, visiting with extended family members and having many welcoming dinner parties for at least the first two weeks of their arrival! Home is where the heart is, and I can attest to the fact that our students are so content and at peace being home for the summers. Once again I must say that it is all of us at the IEAW who make sure our “Afghan daughters” are where they should be in the summer: home with family and friends. We all provide the air transportation together. Nice to be doing the right thing for these young women from Afghanistan, since we know that Afghan culture is all about the family, and there is no place like home.

We have had a big year of growth with our IEAW family this year. Seventeen new students have had to have an English dictionary with them at all times. They qualified for this program but certainly did not speak or write English extensively before coming to the U.S. What I hear is that our students put in double the time for assignments since they are catching up to speed with our language. As another freshman year culminates, we are again impressed with the resiliency and commitment shown by these young leaders of Afghanistan. They put in the extra study time even though it is very tiring, and they have all succeeded as freshmen. So much in the U.S. is different than what they are used to at home. They have freedom of movement all day and night. The foods are completely different. Some of the women have to substitute other sources of protein since they only eat halal meat. They fasted for the month of Ramadan, right at the beginning of the school year! Most have never traveled out of their country or Pakistan before coming to the U.S. I know that we all remain very proud of their freshman year accomplishments.

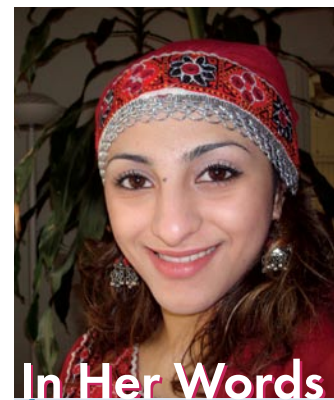
The IEAW will be welcoming eight new students next year, and St. Mary’s College and College of the Holy Cross are our new schools that have offered scholarships. Two students will be attending each of these colleges. Meredith College has offered two more scholarships. Mary Washington and Brenau will each bring another student. That is a total of 20 colleges next year and 46 students. Education is the key to opening minds and hearts. Nice that we will be expanding our efforts to have women from Afghanistan living with people from the United States, proving wrong the misconceptions that we are so different as peoples. As we all well know, the human experience has many similarities. This is more understood when we live with and learn from one another.

We are all blessed to be a part of this program that is working for peace. May we all relax this summer with loved ones, meet new people and nurture our souls after what I am sure has been a very busy year for all. Summer is a good time to reflect on what is most important in this life. Relationships and calm are two key ways to happiness.

Peace to all,



Paula



In Her Words by Huma Manati

It is very rare for Afghan women to get higher education abroad. I was an exchange student in North Carolina, 2004-05. I had great experiences in high school and I always desired to come back to United States and go to college. I returned to Afghanistan in 2005 and worked in an American NGO to contribute towards attending a private college called Preston University because Kabul University has certain rules and limits for selecting a major. I would not have been able to select the field of study I always preferred. I struggled for two years until I heard about the Initiative to Educate Afghan Women program. In the future, I plan to be one of many strong and successful women who will be working in distinguished positions in Afghanistan. I am very patient to see my dream come true. Thanks to the Initiative to Educate Afghan Women and everybody involved with this program for making this possible for me, my family and my country. It is great being at Sweet Briar College; that is why I have set my goals high for a good reason and intend to achieve them.



Advisory Board Meeting and Dinner

The IEAW Advisory Board convened on March 30-31 at the Gensler offices in Washington, D.C., and it was certainly an exciting meeting this year with 16 members attending and coming from Massachusetts, California, Rhode Island, New York, Maryland and Washington, D.C. Seven IEAW students from various colleges and the IEAW staff also attended.

On Sunday evening, the IEAW students and staff hosted the board for a traditional Afghan meal. The students spent the day cooking with several board members slicing and dicing right along with them. The evening was a joyous event as students and board members relaxed over a delicious meal and shared bits of their lives.

To say that the Advisory Board meeting on the 31st was productive would be an understatement. The Initiative is so fortunate to have a board that is as energetic as this one. Members organized three committees during this meeting to assist with development, educational needs and finances, and the energy did not stop at the close of the meeting. The telephone lines and e-mail have been buzzing ever since! The IEAW truly appreciates the dedication of all of the board members.



Washington, D.C. Fundraiser



On April 1st, it was a full house at the Taj of India Restaurant where the Washington, D.C. fundraiser was held. Once again, the dedicated Advisory Board showed their support, and nearly all of the 16 who had attended the meeting on the 31st came to the fundraiser as well as other supporters from the D.C. area.

The night began with a special visit from Sonya Medina, Director of Projects for First Lady Laura Bush. Ms. Medina encouraged the Initiative to continue its work and said that Mrs. Bush considers the IEAW to be a major program aiding Afghanistan's reconstruction. Later, seven of the IEAW students held a question/answer session with the supporters, and with exuberance, they told of the many good experiences that they have had since they began their studies here in the U.S. They also shared their dreams for the future of their families and country.

The event was a success and did not end without a challenge by one donor – Drue Gensler. Drue gave two scholarships at the end of the evening, and she publicly challenged those in attendance to “give big.” It was a great event for the Initiative, and a great time was had by all!



Intersession 2007: December 27 – 31, Washington, D.C.

by Alicia M. Baucom, IEAW Coordinator

Intersession 2007 was no doubt a flurry with 36 students and two staff members touring, cooking, laughing and learning. The IEAW once again brought IEAW students from all sponsoring universities to Washington, D.C. for four days to reconnect with their traditional Afghan culture, rekindle friendships with fellow IEAW students, and to learn about U.S. government structure, history and culture.

Of the many events that occur during Intersession, spending time with one another is top on the students' lists. It allows them to talk endlessly in their native language, cook their delicious Afghan food, wear their beautiful Afghan clothing and even to come together in various rooms to dance to traditional Afghan music until the wee hours of the morning. Among all of the cooking, laughing, talking and dancing, the students get serious and visit important places of interest in Washington, D.C.

A visit to the United States Supreme Court, where Fellow Carolyn Dubay held a private briefing about the Court and the U.S. judicial system, started Intersession off with momentum. Fellow Dubay explained the various levels of the judicial system and the role of the Supreme Court. The students were then given a private tour inside the courtroom, where they asked many questions about the court system.

On Friday, the students joined Ambassador Said Jawad for Afternoon Tea at the Embassy of Afghanistan. Ambassador Jawad reminded them that when they return home they will be among

the elite who will have the knowledge to advance the country of Afghanistan. He then encouraged the students to apply their newly gained knowledge and become leaders when they return home. Following their tea with the Ambassador, the students had a magical evening tour of the White House.

The Sewall-Belmont House, a woman's history museum, was the destination on Saturday. The students were surprised to discover that the women of the United States have only recently been given rights against discrimination. They also learned that the U.S. Constitution still does not state that women have equal rights to men when their own Afghanistan Constitution states that women do have equal rights to men — a paradox that has kept them thinking.

Intersession did not end without a flurry of tears. On the first day of Intersession, the world was startled by the news of the assassination of former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. Prime Minister Bhutto was a source of strength and courage for many IEAW students. To pay respects and mourn the loss of this prominent world female leader, IEAW students spent their final day with a visit to the Embassy of Pakistan to sign the book of condolences that was presented by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. A chant of prayers followed a solemn time of book signing.

With a renewed spirit and ever increasing motivation, the women returned to their respected universities to forge on toward their goals to bring hope and reconstruction to their beloved country. Intersession 2007 was indeed a success.





Anne Schmalz Welcomes Huma and Fazila to Boston

Anne Schmalz wanted to have the IEAW students at her alma mater, Sweet Briar College.

Huma and Fazila are the fortunate recipients of Anne's efforts. Anne rallied her friends, family and fellow Sweet Briar alumni to help fund Huma's and Fazila's four years at Sweet Briar. Doris Buffett was also helpful with this effort with her contribution from the Sunshine Lady Foundation last year.

Our students were hosted by Anne and her husband Bob during the semester break. They had a rich stay with them in Boston and were given a good slice of American hospitality with Anne at the helm of the visit. Anne is another hero/angel of the IEAW. We always welcome cultural exchanges. That indeed is what went on for many folks in Boston during this big-hearted welcome.

Anne wrote the following after their visit: "We have had a fine week with Huma and Fazila in Boston. We did a lot of walking to see various historical sights. The women cooked meals for us and



we enjoyed trying new dishes. We joined friends at Helmand, an Afghan restaurant in Cambridge, we also went to a



Chinese restaurant in Chinatown. We visited the Boston Public Library and did some studying there, went shopping in many different places and took the elevator to the 50th floor of the Prudential Center for the view. On Wednesday the women accompanied me to the meeting of the Boston City Council, (where I am the official League of Women Voters observer) and were presented with a Resolution of Congratulations by the President, Maureen Feeney. On Saturday morning we had a coffee party for supporters of the IEAW from Boston, and everyone enjoyed the Bolani cooked by Fazila and Huma. It was a week of varied activities and gave the women at least an introduction to Boston."

IEAW Students Honored

The IEAW is proud to announce that this school year many of the IEAW students have been recognized and honored for their academic achievements. Among the many achievements were Dean's Lists, inductions into Honor Societies, including Phi Beta Delta, Golden Key International Honour Society, Pi Sigma Alpha, and students named as Sarah Williston Scholar and Middle East Academic Excellence Scholar.

Alean was inducted by Phi Beta Delta (Honor Society for International Scholars) based on her academic achievements and participation in the awareness and development of international education in Kennesaw State University. She received a medal and a certificate.

During the induction ceremony of the Golden Key International Honour Society at Old Dominion University, Alexander D. Perwich II, Golden Key's Chief Executive Officer, said, "It is only fitting that a top academic achiever like Saghar be recognized by Golden Key." Saghar was also named to the Dean's List at Old Dominion.



The students of IEAW are known on their campuses for their study habits, and each of them strives to make top scores. Their efforts have paid off and their families will be proud.



Top: Alean inducted into Phi Beta Delta

Right: Saghar named to Dean's List at ODU and inducted into Golden Key International Honour Society

Students Speak Out

Cultural Exchange by Benafsha Noori

Last semester I was asked to speak at Curry Academy, to their seventh grade students. The mother of one of the students, Ms. Kathleen Worm, was interested in me talking about my life in Afghanistan.

I shared my experiences before, during and after the Taliban. They also wanted to know all about Afghanistan and to learn what we are like as a people. It gave me great pleasure to see how interested these young students were to learn about me and my country. I did feel good sharing information about Afghans at home so they know now who we are and how much Afghans and Americans have in common. They had many questions about Afghanistan. This was a great experience for me as well as the students.



Visiting a Church by Shamim Siddiqi

Dr. James Southerland, chair, department of Humanities, who is one of my favorite faculty members, requested me to talk about myself and my religion to the people of a church he used to attend, First



United Methodist Church of Gainesville, Georgia. It happened on February 24th when he and his wonderful wife picked me up to go to the church. Before I started to speak I chatted with many people. I talked about the IEAW, my goals, life in Afghanistan and my family. (*Shamim is the sixth of nine children; seven females and two males. Only one brother and one sister have been able to attend college.*)

Many people asked questions about my religion and the different divisions in Islam. It was interesting for me to discuss Islam since I know there may be misconceptions about our religion. People wanted to also know how Afghans feel about Americans pulling out the troops. I told them that we do not want American troops to leave our country because Taliban still exist in most provinces of Afghanistan. If Americans leave it will become as it was before.

I felt really good after this talk. I was happy I could answer most questions and I met so many wonderful and knowledgeable people. They want to see me again to know more about me and my country.

Thanks to Dr. Southerland for giving me this opportunity.

Juniata Embraces Cultural Exchange

For 12 years running, Juniata College has celebrated Eid with its Muslim students, and for the past four years, the Eid Celebration and Dinner has been voted the number one event on campus. This year Freshmen IEAW students Basira, Zohra and Razma participated by cooking a native Afghan dish and by performing a native Afghan dance for the 250 guests who attended the celebration. Juniata's president, Tom Kepple, and his wife, Pat Kepple, fully support and encourage an exchange in cultures and attended the event themselves.

The President also encourages IEAW students to participate in the U.S. culture, and one IEAW student, Basira, did just that on her spring break. Basira spent her entire spring break in Florida with 25 other Juniata students volunteering for Habitat for Humanity. She worked side-by-side with other students installing drywall, painting and framing. Basira said that this experience made her stronger and even more committed to helping people. She also said that she met some new friends and gained a new understanding of how Americans develop and enjoy friendships. Basira also volunteers in her college town of Huntingdon. Under the direction of her professor, Celia Cook-Huffman, she teaches kindergarten children about peace and how to behave with each other in times of conflict. Basira's experiences will certainly stay with her for a lifetime.



Interession 2007



Photos

1. IEAW family after one of our student-prepared dinners
2. Roger Williams University students
3. Embassy of Pakistan: giving our condolences to the family of Benazir Bhutto
4. Friends
5. Private briefing and tour of the United States Supreme Court
6. Sophia and Wadia at the Sewall-Belmont Women's Museum
7. New students with Ambassador Jawad
8. More friends!
9. United States Supreme Court and IEAW students
10. Girls being girls
11. Private tour of the Sewall-Belmont Women's Museum
12. Our wonderful students

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

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