

**Name:** Layla Mustafa

**Major:** International Relations, Double Minor in Arabic and Psychology

**Graduation Year:** 2020

**Year(s) in lab:** 2 years

**1. What project(s) were you involved in?**

UCDAR and New York Times Media Project.

**2. When did you join the lab?**

Winter 2019 – Spring 2020

**3. How did you hear about the lab?**

Members of my Arabic class at UC Davis were a part of the lab.

**4. What was the greatest learning experience you obtained from the lab? (150 word limit)**

From my experience, under the American education system, history and politics courses have typically offered a very limited perspective of the Middle East. The vast majority of these courses present the Arab World's history and relevance beginning with the Arab Spring. Working on the New York Times Project was one of my first exposures towards an historical and anthropological perspective of the Arab World prior to the late 20<sup>th</sup>, early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Many of the major events and developments I learned about during my time working on the project, I had previously never known of. Learning about these events primarily through the perspective of a Western newspaper, also aided in creating a mental map of the sometimes shifting, sometimes stagnant, view the Western world has had of the Middle East. This new perspective was the greatest learning experience the lab was able to offer. The new knowledge I received working in lab not only affected my academic perspective of the Middle East, but it gave context to my personal relationship with my culture.

**5. In what ways has the lab challenged you? (150 word limit)**

My last year working in lab, the majority of my time was invested in working on UCDAR and all the research projects which fall under it. Although all the research projects are connected through the consortium, there is a great range of academic fields represented. Initially, this range of subjects was somewhat daunting. Having no prior collegiate experience in STEM, I was worried I would not be able to properly understand some of the research. Despite this early challenge, the diversity of subject matter actually became a blessing towards my academic advancement. I was able to learn about the Arab region from a variety

of perspectives that I most likely would have never been exposed to at any other point of my academic experience. It encouraged me to step outside of the familiar political/anthropological lens and forced me to look into a variety of issues from a scientific, environmental, or gendered perspective.

**6. Why is the lab a unique experience for undergraduate students? (150 word limit).**

Unlike most other undergraduate labs at UC Davis, and other research universities, Dr. Joseph's lab provides a more "hands on" opportunity for its undergraduate students. While members of the lab play a large role in conducting the research, they are also exposed to the vast array of upper-level research being conducted under Dr. Joseph. While there is an overarching emphasis on the Arab region, members of the lab have the unique opportunity of learning about a diversity of topics as they range from history to the environment to gender studies.

**7. What are some highlights from your time in the lab? (150 word limit)**

The best part of Dr. Joseph's lab is clearly the people. Having the opportunity to learn in such an enjoyable way, with a group of people who are just as passionate as I am, fostered my love for the lab. I knew I could always depend on my lab-mates for a thoughtful, second opinion on my work. There was truly no other comfort than of a Friday afternoon shift, sipping tea, and listening to the free flow of ideas and support that never seemed to be of short supply.

**8. If you could describe the lab in one word, what would it be and why? (150 word limit)**

One word to best describe the lab would be "community." We connect communities, we study communities, and we are a community. In an overarching sense, the work we set out to do is meant to connect communities. UCDAR, for example, is a research consortium connecting the scholastic communities of the Arab Region to UC Davis. From a more local perspective, we learn about a community. As members of the lab, we are provided with the opportunity to enhance our understanding of the Arab World and the Arab community. Finally, the learning we undergo in Dr. Joseph's lab creates a community amongst ourselves. The communal feeling shared between lab members has created a safe environment to share our opinions and perspectives.

**9. How has the lab prepared you for your future endeavors? (150 word limit)**

From the beginning, working on the New York Times project, we are encouraged to be more inquisitive, and taught that there may be more than what meets the eye. I found that when I started to ask more questions, I found familiar trends in many news articles and books that I would have never noticed before. This ability

has caused me to call into question many of the headlines I see in the news and encouraged me to look at this information with a more critical eye.