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A Report on the AUD - USC Exchange ^[1]

APDS Blogger: [John Nahas](#)

In late March, twelve students from the Masters in Public Diplomacy (MPD) program at the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism participated in a weeklong conference in Dubai as part of a student exchange with the American University in Dubai's (AUD)



(USC).

The focus of the week was on Middle Eastern politics, media, and culture, and the students had an opportunity to gain an Arab perspective on critical issues facing the region. The group was initially welcomed by AUD President, Dr. Lance de Masi, who spoke about the mission of AUD and its role as an American educational institution in the UAE.

While in Dubai the group met with leading individuals in the Emirate. One of the first meetings was with the U.S. Consul General in Dubai, Justin Sibarell, who spoke about U.S. efforts in the UAE and the broader region. Observing the varied roles and operations of a U.S. Consulate was an insightful experience, and the group discussed many issues with the Consul General pertaining to U.S. Public Diplomacy and the work of the Consulate.

Later on in the week, UAE Minister of State H.E. Reem Al-Hashimy welcomed the MPD students for a discussion about the UAE and broader Middle East (see above). The Minister spoke about the vision of Dubai and the UAE, its Public Diplomacy efforts, and the successes and setbacks that it has incurred over the past few years. The MPD students' discussion with Al Hashimy involved ways to improve U.S.-UAE and Middle East relations and the possible public diplomacy efforts that can be undertaken by both parties, who have positive relations, to help facilitate mutual understanding between other parties in the region.

The group had a chance to travel to the Abu Dhabi Media Company and visit the offices of the English-language newspaper The National and meet with its executives. Back in Dubai the group got to tour the MBC Group and its pan-Arab television news station Al-Arabiya where they had a chance to sit with its Executive Editor. In addition to visiting these two Arab media institutions, the group also observed various panels with other media figures and journalists, gaining important insights into how to address Arab publics, as well as the issues that face Arab media and its viewership. Overall, the MPD students got to observe the growing

importance of Arab media as an international broadcasting actor and its role in local and international affairs in the region.

In addition to politics and media, the group got an understanding of Middle Eastern culture from leading academic, government and media figures. Talks regarding the history, economy, religion and culture of the region helped give the MPD students a richer understanding of the complexities that make up the Middle East. As a complement to the formal meetings, the American University in Dubai organized trips to the Sheikh Zayed Mosque. The MPD group also joined AUD students on a desert safari. In addition, the final two days gave the USC group an opportunity to explore Dubai and its numerous tourist destinations.

Shortly after the graduate students returned, six undergraduates studying film and communications at AUD visited USC as a reciprocation of the student exchange. The students sat in on classes at Annenberg and the USC School of Cinematic Arts, and toured both schools and their facilities. They also met with numerous USC administrators and faculty, and spent time with the MPD group that participated in the Dubai exchange.

This exchange was a success on many levels. It gave the MPD students an in-depth, behind-the-scenes understanding of Dubai and the region, through their numerous interactions with leading individuals. In addition, a relationship was fostered between both groups of students which will continue to enhance the understanding and the institutional relationship between both USC and AUD.

John Nahas graduated from the University of Southern California with a bachelor's degrees in Political Science and Communication with an emphasis on Middle East politics and American Foreign Policy. He is currently in his second year of the Master of Public Diplomacy program at USC and recently concluded an internship at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace's Middle East Center in Beirut, Lebanon. John is also the President of the Association of Public Diplomacy Scholars and is a Senior Editor for PD Magazine .
