**Middle Eastern Students Association by Mona Mohammed**

When I first came to Bucknell, I was focused on finding a footing, a person or group of people who understand and appreciate my Middle Eastern culture and sense of humor. In my search I joined many cultural clubs, such as BASA, SASA, SAAB, among others. I never thought that the one person I was looking for was sitting in my same chair every day for Calculus two lectures. As I was leaving Olin one day, I heard her speak Arabic, quickly I turned around, but I was a second late, she was already inside the building.

Later that same day, I received an email from Lana Bird, who sent an email to me and a couple of Jordanian students about Jusline Sayegh, the newest Arab student on campus from Syria. We were very excited to meet and connect, yet it took us a month to do so. It was Jusline's idea to start the Middle Eastern Student Association, MESA, and her incredible determination and passion made sure that all the necessary details were taken care of in time.

The club's mission is to raise awareness about the Middle East on campus, and also provide a support network to students who identify as Middle Easterners. We hoped that such a club will help attract more Middle Eastern Students to Bucknell.

The club is now one term and a few months old, but has had huge success. We have a number of students from all over the world who have expressed interest in our activities and supported the club through attending as well as organizing different events. Our first event was a cooking event, because we love feeding people. Then of course, we had to talk about current issues, and so we screened a documentary "Reel Bad Arabs, vilifying a people" and had a panel discussion with Professors Martin Isleem, Tony Massoud, Nikki Young and Carolynn Davis. The turn out was great, and the discussion was even better. The take away message was the importance of humanizing the Middle Easterners in opposition to the systematic dehumanization in the mainstream media.

The MESA dinner was a great culmination for us because it allowed us to showcase cultures from different countries of the Middle East, through dances, skits, country stations and food. We were surprised with the quick response and enthusiasm of the campus as we were booked after one day of advertisement. MESA has been a great opportunity for many of us to get to know wonderful people who helped and supported us along the way, especially Jennifer Figueroa who guided us with her wisdom and calmness when we were so close to giving up. Through MESA, we hope to continue forming friendships, raising awareness and sharing the Middle Eastern love.
Prior to attending Bucknell, Black History Month meant haphazardly encountering bulletin boards decorated with pictures of Martin Luther King Junior, Malcolm X, Harriet Tubman, and other token poster children of civil rights movements. It meant doing “research” (Wikipedia) on a particular figure to present at a poorly planned event in front of my classmates in place of a poorly-designed lesson plan. After the month expired the bulletin boards were redecorated and the previous content was no longer significant. That’s what I was taught of the importance of black history and of the instrumentality of black people in the development of this great nation. I knew that these civil rights superheroes were relatively the same color as me, but I’m not sure it meant more than that. I didn’t know what it meant to be black then, and nothing taught me differently. What I could not dispose of, however, were my mother’s first-hand accounts of growing up in the 30s as a working-class, black woman who was hosed, fed in tin pans on the floor, and reminded constantly of her second-class citizenship. Those personal stories evoked very visceral responses from me that I connected with and held on to. They gave me some genuine meaning to being a person of color.

Attending Bucknell has done many things for me and to me, but as a Black person, through my experiences and curiosity, I have realized the role race plays and it has become the most significant part of my identity. I have always been the kind of person who wants to know from where I came but because of the damage done to black history, it is hard to know where that is exactly. Fortunately, I am blessed with the opportunity to attend a great academic institution where this kind of inquiry is welcomed, and via my own pursuits I am constantly gaining access to answers. Being an English major I take great pride in studying African American literature. I am intrinsically aroused by black music and its roots, of language, of race relations as they’ve existed and as they exist, and most prevalent to me on campus, finding an appreciation for and fostering a culture I am able to call my own. I had always grown up in my version of black culture, but what that meant for my soul, my perceptions, and my experiences wasn’t very clear. To this day it isn’t entirely, and I’m not sure I want it to be. My thirst won’t persist if I am surrounded by sea.

This thirst motivated me to join the Black Student Union on campus where we attempt to foster the black community as well as expose the greater, predominantly white, campus community to its richness. This year, we hosted our annual Black Arts Festival at the end of Black History month in February. In the planning process we were thinking contemporary art, and as a result we decided to continue with the freestyle battle, poetry jam, dance workshop, and included the 3rd Annual Bison Stomp-Out classic, a celebration of the Divine Nine sorority and fraternity step culture. There were many other great celebrations of black history taking place on campus as well, which I was more than ecstatic to be able to witness. I sincerely appreciate this institution for its honest support of multiculturalism.
Name: Angel Hernandez

Hometown: Alexandria, VA

Major(s) and minor(s): Environmental Studies & Economics

Campus Involvement: Speak Up Bucknell, B.A.C.E.S, Office of Civic Engagement, Common Ground, Orientation, Organization of Hispanic and Latin American Students, Latino Dance Corner

Favorite Bucknell Experience(s): B.A.C.E.S. service trip in the Dominican Republic, the most amazing life changing experience I've ever had.

Plans after graduation: Teach For America in Dallas, TX

One important lesson Bucknell has taught you: Diversity is more than just the color of your skin, or the country you come from. Diversity can also be your thoughts, perspectives and opinions of the world. The only way to find this in people is by getting to know them on a personal level. Assumptions about peoples’ character can easily be made, especially when we don't take the time to go past the basic "hey how are you? what are you doing this weekend?" Sitting down and having a meaningful conversation with someone you don't really know can be surprising and rewarding. Bucknell has taught me that people can be more than just their external appearance; I just have to make the decision of going deeper to find who they really are.

Advice for current students: Life is better when you devote it to serving those in need. Get involved, no matter what it is, just find something to do where you can use your skills to help others. Go visit the Office and Civic Engagement and find out about the hundreds of opportunities to help.

Name: Masha Zhdanova

Hometown: Golubitskaya, Russia

Major(s) and minor(s): Chemical Engineering

Campus Involvement: International Orientation, Bucknell Alumni Association, Kappa Alpha Theta Sorority, Office of Admissions, Small Business Development Center, Burmese Cultural Association, French Club, Residential Colleges, summer research

Favorite Bucknell Experience: Being a Fremont Scholar and helping international students in any way I can has been an extremely rewarding experience.

Plans after graduation: I would like to work in engineering consulting, environmental health and safety, or engineering risk management. In the more distant future, I might get an MBA and live in Western Europe for a few years!

One important lesson Bucknell has taught you: Nothing is impossible if you work hard for it.

Advice for current students: Get involved! You will always have a chance to say "no" to something you don't like. But if you don't try it, you will never know!
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