

Making a Difference in Rebuilding Iraq: Women Leaders in Science and Engineering: 2011 Newsletter

Mary Oakes Smith, President, IWFF

Dear friends and colleagues:

I am pleased to report that the Iraqi Women's Fellowship Foundation is well into its second year. As you may recall, we bring Iraqi women in science and engineering to the US to spend a year as visiting faculty at top US universities. Our work is based on the conviction that by helping Iraqi women in science and engineering to deepen their knowledge and to hone their leadership and entrepreneurship skills--they will have a much better chance to help put Iraq back on its feet. Based on the results of our 2010 round of scholars, the idea is working.

Last year's scholars were at Stanford, Berkeley, and UC San Diego. We brought the women to Washington, DC to speak at a seminar we sponsored at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. NPR interviewed them and an article on our first year scholars appeared in Alliance Magazine, an international journal on philanthropy. When the women were interviewed by NPR they were asked if they were afraid to return to Iraq given the bombing of universities and assassination of professors that had taken place in recent years. The reply was, "We are not afraid to die! What scares us is dying without having had a chance to make a difference!"



IWFF Faculty Fellows at Woodrow Wilson Center Forum, February 2009

All of our first year fellows have returned to Iraq to teach at universities and share what they learned with the next generation of women in science and engineering. In addition to teaching, one of them is undertaking research on a GIS/GPS project to develop Iraq's electrical control centers. At Stanford she learned about GPS systems, but was also introduced and became committed to solar energy research. This scholar was asked by her government, while at Stanford, to pursue the development of such research, and with guidance from Stanford she is developing a renewable energy center at her

university, and preparing a proposal for a national solar energy center for her ministry. The UC Berkeley scholar, rated a strong achiever at the Berkeley Wireless Research Center, is currently working to integrate industry and academia in research on communications at her university in Iraq. She fostered understandings about Iraq, giving presentations on Iraq to the Berkeley community. In addition to teaching, she is working with Cisco, as head of one of their network academies in Iraq. Last year's UC San Diego scholar, an MSc in Computer Systems, is assisting her government with internet and security system development. She arranged a videoconference between her ministry and UCSD on her return.

Historically, Iraq has taken great pride in its women who traditionally held prominent positions in academia and the workplace. The first Arab female judge in the Middle East was appointed in 1959 in Iraq, as was the first Arab woman minister and cabinet member. In 1980 women got the right to vote, and in 1986, Iraq signed CEDAW (UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women).

But the role of Iraqi women declined during the last half of Saddam's regime. Women were denied access to senior positions in any profession, and universities were denied contact with the external world. After years of disruption and post war turmoil, Iraq is currently lacking skills and leadership in the fields of engineering and the sciences – skills vital to the rebuilding of Iraq.

Having regained equal rights to education and full participation in the workforce, and new rights to seats in parliament, Iraqi women are in position to play a vital role in the development of their country.

IWFF's mission is to empower Iraqi women as leaders, professionals, teachers, and role models for the next generation.

This year we have three scholars at Caltech, UC San Diego, and Smith College. One, a faculty member from the University of Baghdad, has a MSc in Chemistry. She is interested in analytical chemistry, environmental chemistry, water treatment, civil and environmental engineering, and women in science. At Caltech, she is working with Professor Michael R. Hoffman, Dean of Graduate Studies, who is university professor of environmental science and chemistry. She is part of an international research team under his tutelage, undertaking research in her field of interest, and being exposed to the broader engineering curriculum and teaching methods at Caltech. She wants to become a leader of the institute for environmental waste spillage and water treatment at her Iraqi university, and to become a good mentor to her students, using her new knowledge and cultural exposure.

Another faculty staff member, from the University of Technology Baghdad, has a PhD in Industrial Engineering. She is interested in developing her capabilities in quality engineering and TQEM (Total Quality Environmental Management), energy and the environment. At UC San Diego, she is working across Departments with Teams in the Engineering Program (non-profit engineering services), the California Institute for Telecommunications & Information Technology (Calit2) and the Structural Engineering Department. She is eager to expand her knowledge of environmental engineering, and to do some assistant teaching. She aspires to be a mentor and role model for her students and others in Iraq.

A third has an MSc in Computer Science from the University of Technology in Baghdad. Her interests are in computer science, telecommunications, information technology, and women in science. At Smith College, her program bridges the Computer Science Department and Picker Engineering Program. She is strongly motivated to develop her capabilities in computer science education for her students and for future teachers in her field, and to become a mentor to other women in her field.

IWFF Faculty Fellows, 2009 & 2010

Who	University	Areas of Interest	Education	Position
Fellow 1	University of California, Berkeley	Telecommunications and Information Technology; Electrical Engineering; Data Communication and Computer Networking	PhD in Electronic & Communication Engineering	Lecturer in University Engineering College
Fellow 2	Stanford University	Electrical Engineering; Power Engineering; Energy Efficiency	PhD in Power Engineering	Lecturer/Assistant Professor. University
Fellow 3	University of California, San Diego	Computer Security and Virus Protection; Computer Science, Telecommunication and Information Technology; Women in Science	MSc in Information Technology	Teacher, University College of Science
Fellow 4	University of California, San Diego	Environmental Engineering; TQEM (Total Quality Environmental Management); Energy and the Environment.	PhD in Industrial Engineering	Faculty Member in Engineering
Fellow 5	California Institute of Technology (CALTECH)	Analytical Chemistry; Environmental Chemistry; Water Treatment; Civil and Environmental Engineering; and Women in Science.	MSc in Chemistry	Assistant Lecturer in Applied Chemistry
Fellow 6	Smith College	Computer Science; Telecommunications and Information Technology; and Women in Science	MSc in Computer Science	Assistant Teacher in Computer Science Department

The women are heroic -- displaying a thirst for knowledge, ideas, and leadership skills that has not been dampened by the devastating events that have personally touched each one of them.

The host US universities and visiting scholars alike are testimony to the success of the program. Long-lasting ties are being established between the host US and Iraqi universities. A number of top rate US universities have approached us asking for Iraqi women scholars next year. We have more demand

than we can fund. We developed partnerships early on with the Iraqi government and university officials at a 2005 UNESCO conference on higher education in Iraq. We are broadening our partnering with NGOs, foundations, and the private sector. Our contract partner, AMIDEAST, a NGO that administers the Fulbright fellowships in Iraq, administers our program in Iraq.

While funding for our first year and part of our second year has primarily been from the US State Department, we have discovered that private donors have come forward to sponsor Iraqi women fellowships in full or through matching funds. A number of other individuals have made smaller important contributions. We are grateful to all of them.

Please spread the word about our work. Your contribution to IWFF is an investment in Iraqi women and to their important role in the rebuilding and future growth of Iraq. Please visit our website, www.iwffoundation.org or contact me.



IWFF Faculty Fellows, Washington, DC, February 2009

With best regards,

Mary Oakes Smith

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