

# Carolinas Committee on U.S.–Arab Relations

## NEWSLINES

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*Standing on the roof  
of the Globe Tower in Riyadh*



## From Rural South Carolina to Saudi Arabia

*by Anna Scott*

What is the definition of a well-rounded college education? Most would say that it is taking a wide range of courses in one's school career and being involved in on-cam-

pus activities. Whether this be to get a job directly out of undergraduate, to get into graduate school, or simply to say you had a good time with your four (or more) years. To me, it

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## NEWS AND ARTICLES

is not enough to do things simply within your school; you must look at the world beyond your tiny campus. I am a first-generation college student from an extremely rural area in Union, South Carolina. I had never been on an airplane prior to this trip, yet I applied for the Gateway KSA program anyway and crossed my fingers that they would choose me, or maybe bless fully not. When Dr. Joe P. Dunn is your faculty adviser and your department employer supervisor, the push and demand to expand your horizons is not subtle.

This program is funded through the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, so after reading about it, part of me doubted they would choose someone as young

and inexperienced as me. But those who know me know that I am stubborn, so I waited patiently for that email response. The next thing I knew, I was on a plane from New York City to Riyadh, the most grueling fourteen hours of my life. Upon my arrival, we hit the ground running and for the next ten days I met more people, witnessed more raw beauty, and learned more about the world than the previous nineteen years and a half years of my life combined.

The thirteen people in our group were primarily master's and Ph.D. students from schools like Cornell and Oxford, as well as lawyers and engineers from Hong Kong, Munich, and London. Despite being

the youngest and vastly least-experienced participant, I held my own and made it my mission to not feel overpowered by all the older, more-traveled individuals. Just as I have always learned from my older peers on MAL and in classes at Converse, I gained so much from knowing these impressive individuals.

Riyadh was a city of sophistication with discussion with one of the first female members of the Shura (Saudi Parliament), Dr. Hoda Al Helaissi, to dinner with then Crown Prince Turki Al Faisal in his own home. Dammam provided an educational experience at Saudi Aramco and The Mohammed bin Nayef Counseling and Care Center. I was surprised to learn that the Care Center houses around 160-180 former prisoners of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. I know that sounds scary, but being over the Atlantic Ocean for fourteen hours without a soul I knew and no idea of what was before me was more terrifying. Being in Al Ula was like time traveling, seeing three thousand year old monuments and carvings into massive mountains as well as stargazing hundreds of miles from civilization. It made me feel small for the first time in my entire life, which is hard to believe with my 5'2" stature. Jeddah, however, was my favorite city; it felt like home. We visited the Old Town, a section of the city in which everyone knew each other and there was a street cat sunbathing on every corner. Fabric stores lined the streets for miles, along with homes that are older than the founding of the United States. As our tour guide, Eng, showed us around the city, I walked alongside him and asked him so many ques-

tions his ears almost fell off. I even had a joke with him that the only house older than his was my colonial era rural farm house (by fifty years, to be exact). Despite all of the incredibly important people I met, Eng was my favorite. He invited us to his family home for dinner, and it finally hit me that I was on my last night in Saudi Arabia and that I was going to miss it dearly.

This was the most memorable two weeks of my life, from the panels with prominent CEOs of Saudi companies to our entire group collectively sleeping in the King Fahd International Airport, and I hold all of it in a very special place in my heart. When people ask me why I chose to go, I respond, "Why not?" A common question I has been, "How did you handle your schoolwork while you were gone for two weeks?" I had always wanted to study abroad, and the reality is that I valued this visit more than any A in a class. My GPA did take a small hit, but I would never get another opportunity to learn about the world the way that I did in Saudi Arabia. I would say that I learned more from the life experience gained than I ever have in a lecture or from a book.

So to my fellow Converse students and others, I encourage you to broaden your horizons, no matter how scary it may seem. Take that Jan Term course in France or go to Scotland through the Honors Program--just do it! Take every opportunity that is thrown at you! Even if it turns out to not be what you had hoped, you can still say that you have something to be proud of at the end of your four years.

## NEWS AND ARTICLES

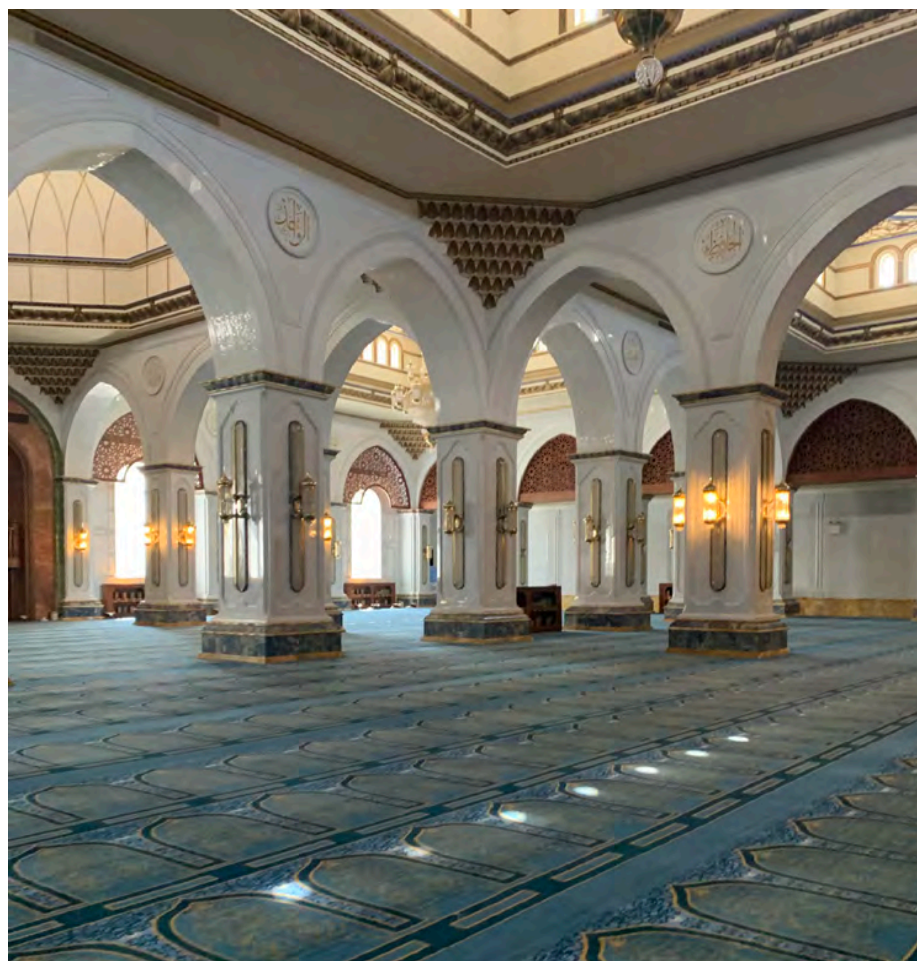
*One of the first female members of the Saudi Parliament, Dr. Hoda Al Helaissi*



*Having coffee and tea in the home of Crown Prince Turki al Faisal*

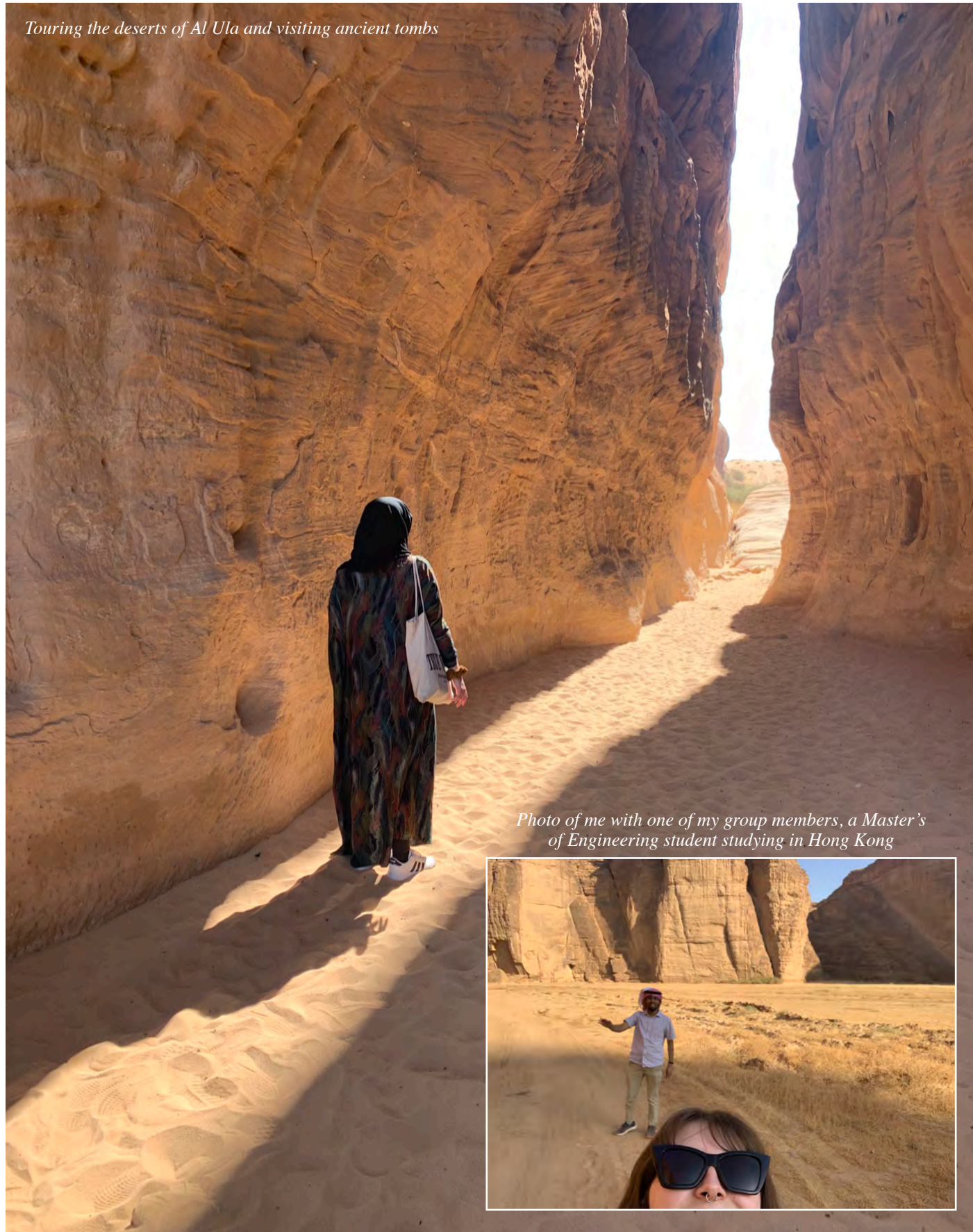


*Inside of the mosque at KAUST*





*Touring the deserts of Al Ula and visiting ancient tombs*



*Photo of me with one of my group members, a Master's of Engineering student studying in Hong Kong*

## Reflecting on My Early Career Path

*by Kaylee Boalt*

If you had told me eleven years ago as a freshman Model Arab League (MAL) student that I would now be seven years deep into a career in international program management and living in Washington, DC, I would not have believed you. I did a wide array of things in college, primarily in music, but what would be different if I had not done MAL at Converse College. I almost didn't because I first passed up the

opportunity to be on Model; but my adviser, Dr. Dunn, refused to let me by with my initial fears and told me that I needed to do this whatever my ultimate career might become.

Four years as a MAL debater, chair, and Secretary General of the National Model in my senior year helped land me my first job after graduation – as a program associate and later the director of student programs at the National Council

on U.S.-Arab Relations (NCUSAR) in Washington, DC. In this role I had an insider's view on how to run both small and large-scale events and the mighty volunteer effort needed to organize a successful MAL conference. Coordinating with enthusiastic college students and their dedicated faculty advisers to recruit schools to participate, select committee chairs, develop the agenda, identify keynote conference speakers, and manage various forums expanded my organization and planning skills. I traveled a lot and learned how to live on the road.

The relationships formed amongst those exceptional student leaders shaped the foundation of my support circle in DC—you can find MAL alumni everywhere! Students I met in the program now lead very successful careers working for the U.S. government, the corporate and non-profit sectors, or, as they apply their MAL-honed research skills, in think tanks, NGOs, and academic centers. Many work with exchange programs. MAL alums often turn to each other for job-search advice, and it has been a pleasure to witness how the MAL program has shaped the careers of friends I originally met as an 18-year-old freshman college student.

The impact on my own career is staggering. Aside from participating in and planning MAL conferences, I had the opportunity to undertake four international study visits with NCUSAR—one visit as a student to Saudi Arabia and three as a staff member, to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Oman. My student experience

*Kaylee and Dr. Dunn*





on the Saudi Arabian study visit was transformational. It was the first time I had ever left the United States and the parallels drawn between my life in the rural American South and life as a college student in a place so very far away from home were illuminating. Although local customs and learning styles were different, meeting with my Saudi Arabian student counterparts was fascinating. At the end of the day, we all sought to determine an answer to the all-important question of what we wanted to do after graduating. For some of us, that road led to graduate school, for others to start their families, and for the remainder of us, it was straight to the workforce. Despite differences in culture and religion, the ability to see firsthand that young adults across the world struggle with same challenges and coming-of-age experiences was pivotal to my understanding of the world and the realization that there is so much more to learn and experience beyond my small hometown community.

As an NCUSAR staffer facilitating these study visits for other college students and their MAL professors, I learned the importance of asking thoughtful questions, finding common ground in surprising places, and navigating the complexities of international travel and exchange. After two fundamental years at NCUSAR, I took a position as a program officer at another DC nonprofit called the American Council of Young Political Leaders (ACYPL), a 55-year-old organization that facilitates U.S. State Department-funded exchange programs for politically active leaders aged 25-40. Many of the skills I learned from

participating in MAL and working for the National Council were critical to success in this role. The amount of research necessary to curate meetings and speakers relevant to the specific policy interests of the international exchange delegates, coupled with the ability to engage in competent conversation on those same policy interests, was a very similar exercise to preparing for a MAL conference. I also leaned on the diplomacy skills learned from MAL to forge relationships and foster common ground between Republican and Democratic bipartisan exchange delegates, in addition to their multi-party counterparts from overseas. Lastly, MAL finessed my capacity to think on my feet in order to problem solve alongside many stakeholders in the face of travel delays, last-minute cancellations, illnesses, and disagreements between delegates.

My experience in MAL also taught me to feel more comfortable navigating the unknown. The travel involved in my role at ACYPL—both domestic travel to new places with visiting delegations and international solo travel—required a new level of confidence and bravery. As a young woman traveling solo to places where women were not necessarily looked upon as leaders and facilitators and where one's very presence could be questioned, I found challenging. I was more afraid to undertake this than I was to leave the country the first time for my first Saudi Arabian study visit. But the perseverance, quick thinking, and ability to make new friends honed by debating in and facilitating MAL conferences led to memorable, transformative work visits to

Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Malaysia.

More than anything, MAL taught me how to become a competent generalist. Whether acting as an environmental issues expert from Oman or a defense professional from Morocco, you have to know enough policy and context to influence and foster meaningful dialogue. Sharpening this skill also gives you the courage to try new things.

After seven years working in study travel and event planning, I recently made a career switch to the corporate social responsibility (CSR) field in DC. Instead of working tangentially to academia and the public sector, I now work very closely with businesses and corporations in the private sector. The learning curve is steep, but so was my journey in Model Arab League. I am now several months into a new job doing meaningful work in trisector partnership building between the private, public, and social sectors—all three perspectives I considered when roleplaying as a Model Arab League delegate. CSR work is incredibly fulfilling. The ability to learn new skills in international program management, to work with the private sector, and to immerse myself in new theories of program design is a spectacular challenge. This avenue of work is transformative—for the communities impacted by the CSR programming, for the corporate employees lending their pro bono expertise to projects, but also for me in facilitating and watching it all happen.

It has been difficult to see good in the world during the global pandemic. But upon reflecting on my

career path, the people and experiences that made me into the person I am, plus the opportunity to develop new skills and apply them to posi-

tive change is incredibly rewarding. I am unsure of what the next eleven years will bring but I know for certain that my time as a MAL

participant prepared me to embrace the unknown and to tackle it with curiosity and enthusiasm.

## How Model Programs Provided the Blueprint for My Professional and Academic Success

by Gabriella Chamberland

In high school when my father would ask about what I wanted my career to look like, I used to say, “I want to help – to bring a little good into this world. I want to go straight for where there is the most suffering and make it better.” He would follow up, “What does that mean? Help who? With what? And how? Which issue, which region, which individuals suffer the most? Who are you to say?” To these questions I had no reply. Perhaps they were a little too deep, a little too existential for a time when I took some pride in being a chronic underachiever.

I arrived at Converse with an athletic scholarship as a soccer goalie and some minor academic awards. I didn't consider myself more than an ordinary student, but I was away from home and full of counter-cultural energy ready to do good in the world. But I lacked direction.

As an anti-establishment type, joining clubs of prestige and pearls was not my “vibe”. Then I ran up against the equally head-strong and determined Dr. Joe P. Dunn, an institution at the college. Dr. Dunn convinced me to tryout for the Converse Model Programs delegation, and amazingly I made the team. At the time, this seemed like a minor thing – one that had at the minimum mean free trips to Washington, DC

and other places. So, I showed up. I practiced. I honed skills in research, persuasive oral argumentation, coalition building, and professionalism all without realizing it was happening. It was just so much fun being on the only all-female group in participation at the regional, national, and international tournaments and enjoying dominating the competition.

In this environment I came to realize that I did not need to forfeit what I felt made me “me” to show up as a professional. I did not need to give up my colorful aesthetic, including my clothing attire that often flummoxed Dr. Dunn. I did not need to make space for lesser men before moving in to advocate for the housing, educational, and financial rights of forced migrants, women,

Chamberland Readiness Picture





and children alike. I did not need to conform to the flawless stereotypes of a political being before speaking my mind in support of equity and trauma-informed decision making. Showing up was enough. Having compassion and backing empathetic policy-based solutions with both compelling narratives and concrete facts was enough.

It is through this program that I cultivated confidence in my professional capabilities at the intersection of policy and social welfare – with a focus on the educational and economic rights of forced migrants. After graduation my journey took me to Indonesia. There I was continually amazed by the sacrifices families made by moving from their beautiful mountain villages to the infamous Jakarta slums to provide their children better educational opportunities. From there, I returned to the U.S. West Coast to work with the International Rescue Committee. Again I was floored in equal parts by the resilience of the resettled refugee families which I served and the unacceptably insufficient national-level policy decisions which hindered their socioeconomic prosperity. Next my peripatetic path took a bit of a “side quest” to Turkey, where I was both Fulbright English Teaching Assistant at a local university and supported UNICEF’s Child Protection programs. If my employment experience following my graduation from Converse College taught me nothing else, it was that social protection systems and international relations are irrevocably entwined – especially in the case of forced migration.

Through these personal and professional experiences, it became

clear that I would need to do something I would not have dreamed of even three years prior: apply for both a Master of Social Work and an International Studies program. My time as a Model Programs debater gave me the confidence in my academic capabilities to apply though I still worried about my ability to cover the cost of this next educational venture. My work experience had not been financially lucrative so I had no money. To my amazement I was able to score (at least for the first year) full tuition coverage to the school of my dreams: the University of Washington in a joint program in international studies and social work. The first year of my dual masters was nothing short of eventful. With the COVID-19 pandemic in full swing, I began completely online, taking over 20 credits while simultaneously working 50-hour weeks at Mary’s Place, a family homeless shelter that served immigrant families.

This was an incredibly challenging time in both my academic and professional career. However, the direction I gained during my time as a Model Programs debater was strong. I knew I needed continually to put those with the most numerous systematic barriers to their socio-economic wellbeing at the forefront of my mind regardless of the strain it put on my academic career. Fortunately, due to the time-management skills I first started to develop at Converse College, I was able to succeed both as a caseworker and a student – maintaining a 3.9 GPA throughout the year and being awarded a Boren Fellowship for 9-12 months of intensive Turkish language study in Azerbaijan

(though I had to decline the academic year portion of the award due to COVID-19 related travel constraints).

In August 2021 I was excited to begin the last year of my graduate-level studies in social work and applied international studies. However, as I began to plan my class schedule, Kabul fell. The Taliban took over and over 75,000 Afghan women, children, and men fleeing persecution were evacuated to the United States. I could not sit quietly and continue my studies. I applied for an emergency role with the International Rescue Committee and was deployed to one of the eight U.S. Safe Havens bases to support in the resettlement processing of these families and individuals.

As I come to the close of my deployment, I remain concerned with many of the issues that drove me back for my masters’ degrees: ineffective policies, pundits more concerned with optics and perceived efficiency than actual welfare, and overall shortcomings of social protection systems which have now been even further strained by the COVID pandemic. I remain committed to my studies (and perhaps secretly have designs on acquiring a Ph.D.), with the understanding that providing trauma-informed and strengths-based service to this new wave of forced migrants within our own borders is now my top priority. I remain convinced that without my participation in Converse College’s Model Programs, my absolute passion and commitment to either would have never been nurtured.

To paraphrase from one of the innumerable conversations I had

with my professors and peers during my time in Model Programs, “anything worth doing is worth do-

ing well” – but it doesn’t all have to be done at once. And just sometimes, simply showing up for com-

munities in need (and yourself from time to time) is enough.

## Southeast Model Back in Person Again

by Joe Dunn

After a two-year absence (cancelled in 2020 and virtual in 2021), the Southeast Model Arab League conference was held in person, March 18-20, 2022, at Converse. Covid had wreaked its impact so the Model was much smaller than in the pre-Covid days. Only 10 schools participated with Converse having two delegations, 11 countries were represented. But it was wonderful to be back in person. Besides long time regulars, the conference welcomed Centenary College, from

Shreveport, Louisiana as a first-time participant.

Converse sophomore student Anna Scott presented opening remarks on her Fall trip to Saudi Arabia with Global KSA and she made a plea for students to engage in the world and grasp every possible opportunity such as this.

Secretary-General Delaney Leslie from Converse opened the conference which consisted of three days of debate and resolutions. Converse chaired all the councils

which made a very consistent platform across all the venues. At the end of the conference, the faculty selected Anna Scott (Joint Defense Council) and Bree Cowan (Environmental Council) as the Best Chairs.

At the Awards Ceremony, Converse’s Qatar delegation with awards in six of the eight councils was named the Outstanding Delegation and Mercer University (Oman) was named Distinguished Delegation.





## National University Model Held in Ronald Reagan Conference Center

by Joe Dunn



NUMAL Delegation

Back in person for the first time in three years and for the first time, the National University Model Arab League (NUMAL) was held at the Ronald Reagan International Conference Center in Washington, DC, March 25-27, 2022. The impressive facilities added gravitas to the event. The keynote speaker, Joey Hood, U.S. Department of State Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, gave an inspiring, informative presentation. Mr. Fahad Nazer, spokesman of the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Washington, also provided interesting remarks.

Covid still hung over the event as masks were still necessary and two Arab universities, the American University of Cairo and New York University Abu Dhabi campus, were not able to come for the event. But the excitement of person-to-person interchange was the most prevalent theme in the three days of intense activity. The conference set a record of resolutions passed. Covid may still have been in existence but one could never tell from the huge crowds that had flocked to D.C. for the Cherry Blossom Festival, the kite show, and the Rock and Roll Marathon. Thousands of

high school and college students on Spring Break were part of the throngs that covered virtually every inch of the Mall and made the sidewalks almost impossible to navigate when one ventured outside the Reagan Conference Center.

At the Closing Ceremony, Dr. Holly Jordan, Director of Business Development of ANERA (American Near East Refugee Aid), which works with development projects in health care and other areas in Lebanon, Jordan, and the West Bank and Gaza of Palestine, was the conference keynote speaker. Her inspirational speech, which traced her

career from her freshman year at Converse College, when she first joined Model Arab League, through her various levels of involvement in virtually every aspect of the program and other aspects of the National Council as an undergraduate through her Ph.D. and then as a visiting faculty member, resonated with the students. She also talked

about the important role of development agencies such as ANERA in the region where she had just returned from 25 days on the ground.

At the Awards Ceremony, Converse University and Northeastern University were named the Outstanding Delegations. Mercer University, Georgia State University and the University of Wyoming

were cited as Distinguished Delegations. Errin Baylis (Special Council on Poverty and Unemployment) was selected by the faculty as the Outstanding Chair and Bree Cowan (Environmental Affairs) as the Distinguished Chair. Both were from Converse University, which held five of the overall chairs.

NUMAL Delegation

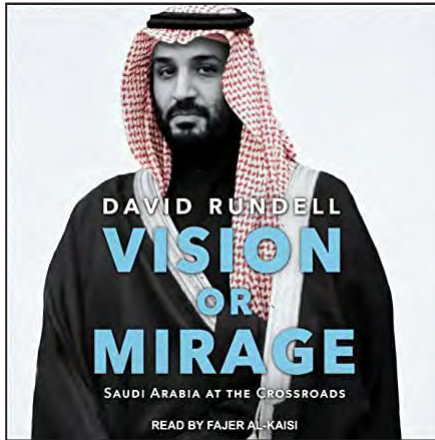




# LEARNING RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

## *David Rundell, Vision or Mirage: Saudi Arabia at the Crossroads*

*By Dr. Joe P. Dunn, Charles A. Dana Professor of History & Politics, Converse University*



The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is experiencing unprecedented and meteoritic changes. The old ways that have persisted for hundreds of years in Arabia and the political, economic, cultural, and strategic norms of the Kingdom in its relatively brief history are under assault. Few if any individuals are better able to address this virtual revolution than David Rundell, a life-long diplomat in the region, including fifteen years in the Kingdom. He has served in Saudi Arabia as chief of mission, chargé d'affaires, deputy chief of mission, political counselor, economic counselor, commercial attaché. This is an unrivaled concentration in any single country anywhere in the world. He lives in Dubai and London, and travels regularly to Saudi Arabia as a consultant. As one commentator remarked, literally no one knows the Kingdom better.

As another commentator says, Rundell is “pro-Saudi” and at the same he is entirely objective.” His underlying theme is how an absolute monarchy has survived into the 21st century and can it continue to be. The treatise traces the fascinating history of the kingdom through all its struggles, the interplay between its various stakeholders, the balance between deep rooted ultra-conservative traditionalism and accelerating change, the blend of the medieval and the hyper-modern.

As the book clarifies, the political order has never been static, but today it does face the most series challenges in its history. Rundell devotes his final chapters to the economic challenges, security challenges, political challenges, and what he dubs “evolving Arabia.” The author duly recognizes what the last of the sons of founding monarchy Abdullah, the reigning autocratic King Salman, has engineered, including the passing of the old successional order to ensconce his son in power, most likely for many decades. And in the process he has transformed the economy within the globalized world and brought a more tolerant Islam to the fore. The treatment of the present Prime Minister/Crown Prince, the quixotic and authoritarian Mohammed bin Salman, is nu-

anced. How the overly-ambitious transformation of society through Vision 2030 will fare is important.

In the end Rundell concludes that it is possible that Saudi Arabia might evolve into a liberal world order state rather than an authoritarian, repressive country. It has much in place for this evolution. The West cannot ignore the heinous actions of the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi, the treatment of political activists, or the barbaric war in Yemen. Saudi Arabia must be made aware of the costs of such practices. But Western withdrawal and ostracizing are not a viable approach. The reforms in play and political stability are in the West’s interest and all is inter-tangled. Rundell counsels sustained involvement with the Kingdom to encourage reform toward global norms. His final sentence speaks volumes: “These efforts will certainly be more successful if they push with the grain of Saudi culture and history rather than against it.”

Simply put, this is an important book that all policy makers and students of the region should confront. As former Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Chas Freeman expresses, the book “is destined to be the best single volume on the kingdom. It will be a long time, if ever, before it is bettered.”