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*First Model Trip to DC as Freshman
with my Senior Partner*



Communication and Leadership: From Student International Models to National Politics

by Kennedy Anderson

Preamble

Because of Joe Dunn's illness, I had the privilege of escorting the Converse delegation to the

National University Model Arab League conference this Spring as the designated faculty representative. It was in many ways a cap-

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My delegation as Head Delegate and Secretary General of NUMAL 2021

stone to my wonderful career in Model Programs. My personal story follows.

Joining Model Programs

Attending Converse was the last thing I expected to do. I was headed to Davidson College, my dad's alma mater, but my mother dragged me to the Converse campus for a tour in April of my senior year. I had lunch with Dr. Joe P. Dunn, and my life changed. I gushed about my plans for law school, and Dr. Dunn informed me that my mind would change several times over four years. I would be someone different by the time that I graduated. His intensity was palpable; his zeal inspiring. My Converse education molded me to seldom give credit to men, but Dr. Dunn could not have been more right. I would have never guessed that my undergraduate life would have been filled with leading an

internationally acclaimed team, traveling to the MENA, creating the format and running two international models globally, and managing a "senile" (his words) professor's life. I could not have forecast that these experiences would one day lead me to become the Press Secretary for one of the most powerful political figures in the U.S. Congress.

Model Programs and Dr. Dunn deserve most of the credit for my professional development and success. Being surrounded by a group of self-assured, intelligent women helped mold me into the woman I am today. Observing the first demo for potential members of the Converse Model Programs delegation immediately hooked me. I had always thought myself to be worldly, but watching these young women debate topics about countries that I knew nothing about made me realize how

much I still had to learn about the world.

Preparation for tryouts for the delegation was like an Olympic sport. I dedicated each day to researching everything I could about Arab League member states. I wanted to prove to myself and to every woman on that team that I was not only capable of being one of them but one of the best. The day of tryouts is permanently seared into my brain. I had just flown back to South Carolina from my grandfather's celebration of life ceremony. I put on my best pencil skirt, my power pumps, and a pair of earrings that my grandfather had purchased for me shortly before his passing—they would become my conference earrings and good luck charm—and I took on tryouts.

After making the team, I started on my mission to learn everything I could about international politics. Model Programs stands apart from other extracurricular activities because it is truly student-led. Dr. Dunn served more as a loving support system, motivator, and mascot, while the real teachers were our fellow teammates. I remember being both terrified and completely in awe of the senior leaders who served as the head delegates in my freshman year. I didn't dare to dream that I would ever reach their stature. They did not prepare me to debate with other college students; they prepared me to debate

as if I were in front of actual international leaders. They pushed me to my limits in research, public speaking, and time management. Their expectations resulted in a Distinguished Award at my first conference.

Converse Days

With that award, I had the fever. I wanted more. Dr. Dunn saw this eagerness and took me under his wing. From that moment on, I began to take on more leadership on the team and in the classroom. Dunn relinquished the keys to his life and entrusted me to be his assistant in class. I helped develop lessons for Civil Rights and the introductory level international politics courses. Over the next four years, I became Dr. Dunn's personal assistant, teaching assistant, communications director, and proxy daughter.

By graduation I was the student body president running student government and mingling with the college president, provost, and trustees; head delegate of Converse's Model Programs (would never have dreamed of that as a mere freshman); designer and administer of two international model conferences; but most importantly managing Dunn's life. (As aside, I was also on the dance team as well.) Between his wonderful wife and his "proxy" daughter, we made him look pretty good most of the time. It wasn't an easy task because he

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With Secretary of Transportation and Congressman James Clyburn

didn't always listen to us as he should.

During my tenure on the team, I traveled to Morocco and Qatar before COVID-19 shut down the world. Models across the country were put in jeopardy.

Students could not safely gather and debate. While interning virtually with the National Council on the U.S. Arab Relations during the first COVID summer, I was tasked with devising a way to have delegates train and com-

pete virtually. The system that I created was put in place and used across the country. International Model NATO—another model our team participated in—asked me to design a system for them as well. My logistics skills were put to the test as I was challenged to plan a virtual model that could be conducted simultaneously across the U.S., Canada, and Europe, ten time zones from the Pacific Ocean to Eastern Europe, and to coordinate training for over 25 university delegations in various countries.

Dr. Dunn's prediction came true. When I graduated, I no longer considered law school. He had groomed me for the academic life and although getting a Ph.D. these days was hardly a road to success, he emphasized that as a very talented woman of color I had some advantages in a tough market. And he suggested that as he was in his late seventies, he might retire someday (which all of us doubt) and I could be his successor. I had some Ph.D. program offers, but I chose the route of the NYU School of Professional Studies to pursue a master's in global affairs. I planned to employ my leadership, research, and logistics skills to pursue a life in academia and applied policy. However, life, at least temporarily, took me in another direction.

Present Career

Before I packed off to New

York City, I decided to gain a little real world experience. In June 2021 I applied for several entry-level Congressional staff positions and was offered a full-time position in Washington, D.C. with the office of Congresswoman Lauren Underwood of Illinois. I packed up all my business attire (my former model program outfits) that I could fit in a suitcase, and I moved to D.C.

Being a "Dunn Girl" (an elite status that several of us proudly claim), I made it my goal to master my entry-level position within the first six months and get promoted. When I accepted the offer, I was told I could focus more on the policy side or the communications side of politics. It was a small office of a very young House member, so I opted for both. I quickly found that I had a knack for political communications.

Interview and town hall preps, assisting with cabinet secretary visits, social media post drafting, and compiling press clips comprised my day-to-day agenda. A previous Congressional internship and the powerful Model Programs training made my transition to the fast-paced life of a Hill-staffer smooth. In December 2021, I was promoted and made an official member of the Congresswoman's press team. I was responsible for press for the Black Maternal Health Caucus, and I was charged with expand-

ing the email portion of her digital strategy.

By April 2022 I faced the choice of staying with my office or moving up in a new office. I had the option of joining the press team of Katherine Clark, who is today the House Minority Whip, or the press team of the then House Majority Whip James Clyburn. I had interned with Congressman Clyburn as an undergrad and returning to South Carolina politics had great appeal. At 24, a little more than two years from undergraduate school, I am the second in command for communications for one of the most powerful political figures in the nation's capital. I have met with and coordinated events with the Vice President and multiple cabinet secretaries. I could have never imagined this life.

Let me say it bluntly, Dr. Dunn's unrelenting expectations and the impact of the indefatigable entourage of Model Program debaters gave me skills, confidence, and courage to believe that there are no limits. Whether I stay in the political arena or opt for the Academy, which Dunn never ceases to mention, I know one thing: I will always be grateful for Model Programs. I hope that scores of others who come after me have and take advantage of this unique opportunity.

Lasting Impact: Reflecting on 20 Years Since Model Arab League

by Valerie Naglich, MPA



Valerie Naglich, MPA

It is hard to believe that it has been 20 years since I last banged my gavel, signaling the end of four successful years as a member of the award-winning Converse College Model Arab League team. It was 2003, my senior year: I was co-head delegate of a mighty team of women, many of whom had been at my side for the past three years. I joined Model Arab League as a freshman, thanks to a last minute decision to take an history honors course rather than an honors art course.

I started at Converse as a vocal performance music education major and my advisor told me that as a student of the arts, I must take an arts course. I disagreed, stating that my interest was in history and at a liberal arts college, I'd much prefer taking a course on the history of the 1960s civil rights movement than a college course

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in printmaking. I wound up at Dr. Dunn's doorstep and begged to be allowed to join his already overfull course. I guess that I was already demonstrating some skills in persuasion because he let me join his class. That fall semester Dr. Dunn changed my life forever. He took me aside and said something that I will never forget: "You're smarter than you think you are." I count myself beyond lucky that this professor took such an interest in me as a student that he would boldly encourage me and suggest options I had never considered for myself. In addition to handing me a change of major form and becoming my advisor, he also selected me as one of the very few freshmen to join Model Arab League that year.

I didn't know the first thing about Model Arab League when I joined. It was 1999 and the most

I knew about the Middle East was related to what the news had told me about the Gulf War. At my first practice, I was stunned into silence – these women were incredible and I immediately wanted to emulate them. They knew so much, not just about the Arab world, but about the issues facing each individual country. I was quickly taught how to gain this knowledge. Google had only recently been invented in 1998 so the best way to obtain this information was to go the library and check out every newspaper, journal, and book related to the topic. I printed everything I read into a giant binder, sorted by countries and with maps and other details that I wanted to use in debate. I quickly realized it was as much learning about the individual countries (i.e., how does Syria differ from Lebanon, and how does Egypt

differ from Libya?) as it was issues of social justice, the environment, and other issues. The team also knew how to structure a successful argument and cram a compelling point into a minute or less of time. I had never heard anyone speak this way – it was so thoughtful, deliberate, purposeful.

In addition to building my knowledge base, I also had the privilege of learning from the very best. In reflecting back, what a wonderful opportunity I had to be an integral part of a group of women who built each other up so that we could each be successful award winners. We needed each other to be excellent to be the award-winning national team we had been for years and that meant providing constructive criticism to each other, listening to each other, and helping each other however we could. In a society where women are often pitted against one another, as we were vied against one another in debate, we helped each other succeed. Perhaps this is the reason Converse has been such a powerhouse all these years – that we truly became a supportive family interested in succeeding together as much as we were interested in winning our individual awards.

The fall of my sophomore year brought terrible news: my beloved head delegate Anna Klepczynski lost her brief and painful battle with leukemia. It is an understatement to say our team was heart-

broken – we were absolutely gutted. Anna was such a force. She made her perfect arguments while killing you with kindness all at the same time. She was so genuine and an incredible mentor. She taught us how to work hard, and then to work even harder. She was truly the person I wished to be. Dr. Dunn established an award in her honor that spring and I made it my secret goal to win that award when I graduated senior year, to be like Anna as much as I possibly could be.

Everything changed forever the next year. It was my junior year, September 2001, and it was the first day of classes. I remember where I was standing in my dorm room, watching the Today Show and learning that the World Trade Center twin towers had been hit. I immediately knew what happened. My freshman year we had represented Sudan and I was on the Security committee. In practice and at both the Southeast and National models, we were repeatedly accused of harboring Osama bin Laden as well as of Sudan's role in the twin bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998. I was by no means an expert on Osama bin Laden, but when his name was said that day for the first time on September 11, unlike many Americans, I already was familiar with who he was and what he had done. Classmates and family reached out, knowing my role in Model Arab League,

and wanting to know everything I knew to understand. Model Arab League forever shifted for me – it became something I consumed even more, wanting to know everything that was now directly related to my daily life.

So back to 2003: I served as Secretary General of the Southeast Model and chair of the Social Committee at the National Model. It was my first year chairing, which was a much different experience than serving as the lead debater for our team. I loved debating so much, being persuasive in my arguments to a crowd and winning others over, that I thought there was no way that chairing would provide me as much joy and satisfaction. But my senior year, Dr. Dunn wanted me to chair, so chair I would. I was intimidated as I had never done it before. I found myself walking across Converse's campus between classes, muttering parliamentary procedure to myself so I would absolutely nail any motion that was raised with eloquent and swift resolution.

I found that I loved chairing – commanding a room, setting the pace of debate, monitoring interactions, and influencing the decision-making. I found that being a fair, consistent chair impacted the flow of debate significantly. My relentless practice of parliamentary procedure responses paid off in dividends; having such deep knowledge of the rules allowed me to coach new debaters into

the proper process versus shaming them so that they shied away from speaking up again. I loved motivating new debaters and providing a space in which they could thrive. And I loved mentoring others to become chairs. I was thrilled at commanding the entire auditorium as Secretary General and loved the issues management role it provided in resolving any conflicts that arose from the various debate rooms.

At Nationals – held that year at the Watergate Hotel – I was honored to serve as the chair of the Social committee and was ultimately recognized as “Best Chair” at Nationals. And that spring at Converse's awards ceremony, I won the Anna Klepczynski Award

while tears streamed down my face. It was absolutely my proudest moment and then the unthinkable happened: I had an award named after me, which was then awarded to my co-head delegate. I was stunned, to think that my four years in the Model program would last on past my 2003 graduation through the annual issuance of this award. I've been lucky to meet several of the award winners over the years; I even hired one to work for me at CDC.

In looking back, it is evident that one conversation with a professor my freshman year changed the course of my life forever. I often think about whether I will have the opportunity to shape someone's life as significantly as

Dr. Dunn shaped mine. His decision that day to encourage me led to every success I had in my time at Converse and onward. He taught me to believe in myself, to not sell myself short, and to be bold and go for what I want. The one time that I didn't follow his advice, I have always regretted. At the end of my freshman year, I had the chance to go to Morocco to study. Instead I went home to work in Kohl's and be with my boyfriend of the time. I learned over the years that when Joe Dunn gives you opportunities, you don't forego them. [He didn't care for the boyfriend either whom he told me was manipulating me and I could do much better.]

- I would be remiss if I didn't share some of the life lessons that Model League taught me that I still think about and apply in my daily life twenty years later.
- In quick summary:
- (1) *Always be over-prepared. Research is power. My career has benefited from that truth.*
 - (2) *Always put your best foot forward. In my Model Arab League years, we prided ourselves on our appearance – sleek suits, colorful scarves, and for me and a few others, the signature sunglasses as a headband. We were always styled; we would never show up to debate with wet hair. I think about this rule often in our new virtual work environment. I often hear people say they cannot turn on their video for a scheduled meeting because they didn't do their hair or makeup, which I personally perceive as someone not putting their best foot forward for that work day.*
 - (3) *Strategy is important. Dunn taught us to know where to sit in a room for maximum visibility, and when to speak for the greatest impact. If you want to be an influencer, think strategically all the time.*
 - (4) *Never say “never.” The second you use the word “never” or “always” in an argument, you've lost. Because it is never true. Coming to a workable solution, which requires compromise, is always the goal. Keep the focus on accomplishing the mission.*

The Wind at my Back: Model Arab League & Joe Dunn

by Grace Bagwell Adams, PhD, MPA



Joining the Team: An Untraditional Path

It is not a stretch to say that those six letters appearing after my name in the author line would never have been there without Dr. Joe Dunn, his mentorship, and Model Arab League at Converse College. In the fall of 2003, I moved into Converse College as a freshman from Boiling Springs, South Carolina. To say it was a small town at that time would have been generous. I was a legacy student at Converse—my mother had graduated from there in 1978 with a vocal performance degree, and I was determined to follow in her music and arts footsteps by pursuing a theater ma-

jor with a dance minor. I had one other aspiration to note—I wanted to be Miss America, and I had already planned on competing in local pageants so that I could get to Miss South Carolina pageant. Beyond that, I didn't have any idea where I would end up or what I would do after my four years on the beautiful Converse campus.

I could not have imagined how that time would change me and the trajectory of my life. On that humid move-in day in '03, a photographer from the Spartanburg Herald Journal snapped my photo and it appeared in the "Life" section of the paper the next day: a young girl in jeans, t-shirt, and ponytail with her arms full with dorm-room accoutrement and her chin tucked on top of the load she carried so it wouldn't fall on the ground. I saved that photo and it's hard to imagine being her now, 20 years later. Even though it seems far away, my memories of those days and how my path unfolded are crystal clear.

Not too long after I began at Converse, I heard students talk about the chair of the history and politics department—both famous and infamous at the college for his intense dedication to a debate team called the Model Arab League (MAL) and for his ability and willingness to mentor the women who came through

the department and MAL (which I soon heard were called "Dunn Girls"). In the winter term of my freshman year, I signed up for his honors seminar in International Relations and spent six weeks in fear and awe of this man, the most knowledgeable person I had encountered, speak with fervor, passion, and eloquence about the topics in the course. It scared me. It also ignited a deep passion for new topics that I could not ignore. I stayed on the theatre track, but I began taking more classes in history and politics and by the spring of my sophomore year, I knew that I had to change course. I meet with Dr. Dunn in his office, feeling nervous and shy (feelings that are not typically characteristic of me at all). I was there to declare a history major. It did not go as I expected.

"No!" said Joe, in a characteristically convincing and convicted voice. You will double major in history and politics. You will join Model Arab League and you will win awards. You were made for debate. You have some catching up to do, because you will be a junior and most women have been on the team for two full years by then, but you can do it. I have seen you in class; you are smart and you use your voice. You need to do it on this team. And you need to do it now! That is how I

remember the conversation, anyway. I was sort of astounded that he seemed to know me better than I knew myself. The idea that this small town girl from rural South Carolina would immerse herself in a culture that was so completely and utterly foreign was daunting. That I could compete on the mythic, legendary team of women who had appeared on the College's magazine the previous fall for beating Ivy-League Harvard? The magazine cover alone was emblazoned in my mind: women holding gavels in dark suits, perfect hair, cheekbones that could cut glass. And they were not smiling coyly. They were fierce. They looked like they could chew up Harvard men and spit them out for breakfast and then debate their way all the way to Capitol Hill. So, little ole me? On that team? According to Joe Dunn, that was a yes.

Model Arab League: Lessons and Experiences

I'll never forget tryouts. I put on a suit, and showed up in Carmichael Hall on the 3rd floor. It was a Sunday night, as tryouts and then weekly rehearsals always are. It was intellectual debate at a breakneck pace. I tried to keep up, and apparently I did because I got the note soon after that I was on the team. Elated, terrified, I connected with the head delegate that year, Elizabeth Mayes. She invited me to her room one night after

practice. She handed me a 3-inch thick three ring binder that was as heavy as lead. She said "this is my MAL notebook, all my research is here. You can borrow it and make your own. You'll need profiles on every single country. We always start with the CIA World Fact Book. Then, you'll need to create a much deeper dive on the country you represent this year." I carried it back to my room and dug in. I bought my own binder and started filling it up, and began preparing to represent Palestine.

Over the course of the next two years I grew exponentially. First, Palestine, then Iraq, my senior year. For the first time in my young life, I was using my talents and skills to their greatest extent—all those skills I had built in theatre and even pageants put to use in fervent debate but with the additional heavy lift of being well-informed and extensively researched on some of the most complex topics in the world of policy and governance. This was a post 9-11 world, and the years on MAL for me overlapped with the beginning of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Arab-Israeli conflict and commensurate intergovernmental relations in the Middle East became a daily topic of conversation for me, and the coursework with Joe and other Converse faculty opened my mind to the topic of social justice as it related to this region of the world. I could feel both my understand-

ing of the world and the expectations I had for myself being completely transformed. I was raised in a household by parents who taught me to ask important questions—my days at Converse took that to the next level.

Then, the day finally came to compete. And I won—Joe was right. I put on my signature red suit, heels, and pantyhose with a matching scarf and I marched in that room and took Best Delegate every single time. The preparation of rehearsal and my 3-inch binder served me well. But, reader, understand that it is not just the ability to cogently argue that MAL imbues; it is the ability to caucus. To network. To convince people who are diametrically opposed to what you are saying and what you are proposing to not just support you, but to agree with you. And often, this is accomplished by simply acknowledging their presence and their ideas. For the two years I was on the delegation, we swept every single committee and overall Best Delegation at all regional and national MAL events. We also started a Model NATO team and won those awards too. Working with those women toward a common purpose taught me about female power and intellect. What MAL also taught me to do was to negotiate fiercely, to articulate my own ideas, to set an agenda and then to get items on that agenda accomplished by striking a compromise that worked for the majority of

folks in the room. And those are the skills I still carry with me now.

Beyond Converse to Today

My senior year at Converse, Joe sat me down and asked what my plans were after graduation. The truth: I did not have any. I had continued to pursue my goal of becoming Miss South Carolina and had won the title of Miss Boiling Springs to represent my hometown in the pageant that following summer; but beyond that I did not know what I would do. I had casually turned the idea of law school over in my mind, especially given my idea that I would get to continue debating people for a living, now that I knew I was good at it. Joe once again changed my course.

“I’ve sent a long line of Connies to the University of Georgia. They have the number three program in the nation for Public Administration and Public Policy. You should apply.” I had no idea what that really meant or where I would get the money, but I followed his advice and applied. I was admitted and the day of my senior Dance Ensemble performance at Converse, Joe came backstage before the concert and told me he had just gotten off the phone with the department chair in the graduate program at UGA and that I was fully funded. I had a full ride to Georgia. I graduated in May 2007 and received another Dunn Girl’s legacy award from Joe, the Valerie Brock Award. And

like many others, I followed in her footsteps to attend UGA in the fall of 2007.

I received my Masters in Public Administration in May of 2009. By then, I had changed my focus from international affairs and relations to domestic ones after studying public policy and domestic poverty in the United States during my masters’ degree. I considered looking at another institution to continue, but the University recruited me for the Ph.D. program in public policy, which I received in August 2013

As I pursued my graduate education, it slowly dawned on me that I had the opportunity to be in the classroom like Joe. He actually hired me to teach summer school at Converse, which was great honor. With a Ph.D., I could teach and mentor and research. I could empower women to pursue their dreams while continuing to pursue my own. I could travel the world and present my research and even be involved in the policy making and policy analysis process. All these new possibilities emerged that I never even knew existed back when I began my Converse journey in the fall of 2003. And I chased them all—with the passion imbued in me through my MAL and Converse experience, and my work has the common thread of social justice that was first sewn in the debate room and the classrooms of Converse.

Fast forward a bit to Spring

2023. I am now an associate professor with tenure at the University of Georgia’s College of Public Health in the Department of Health Policy and Management. Over the last ten years, I have built an academic career with the goals of mentoring students and pursuing a life of inquiry that uses my own life experience to motivate meaningful research. I spend my days in the classroom teaching students about public policy, public health, and how we as a society can work toward addressing issues of equity, justice, and improving well-being. I also spend my days with the love of my life, Clayton (who I met and married in Athens), and our two small children Bonnie (5) and Theodore (2). In a very large way, I have Joe and MAL to thank not only for my education, but for my life as a whole.

In June 2022, I was invited back to Converse to receive that year’s distinguished alumna award. Of course, it was Joe who nominated me for it. Ever my champion, he was still behind me, loving me and pushing me forward even 15 years after graduation. I reflected that day on my own path and on his mentorship, and on the fact that I am the first person in my direct family line in over two and a half centuries to leave Spartanburg County. It was remarkable then, and it is remarkable now. And it’s Joe Dunn and the long lineage of Dunn girls that were the wind at my back.

Southeast Model Back in Person Again

by Joe Dunn

SERMAL was held March 17-19, 2023 at Converse University with eleven participating delegations from Alabama, Arkansas, Virginia, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. This was Converse’s 25th year participating at SERMAL, 23 of which at the University after the conference moved from Savannah, Georgia in 1998.

Two former Converse head delegates, Sidney Jones (‘17) and Kennedy Anderson (‘21), were the conference keynote speakers. Sidney was a program director for the National Council on U.S.-Arab

Relations before working in public relations for the Embassy of Qatar in Washington, DC. She is now an independent consultant. Kennedy is the press secretary for the Honorable James Clyburn from South Carolina, the former Democrat House Whip.

Delaney Leslie and Hannah Norton (both 2022 Converse graduates), the present National Council program assistants administering Model Arab League programs nationally and internationally, were the Council’s liaisons at the Southeast Model

Converse, representing Iraq,

took the Outstanding Delegate Award in 7 of the 8 Councils to claim first place at the competition. The other delegations cited were the University of Arkansas—Little Rock (Qatar), Mercer University (Tunisia), and Spartanburg Community College (Mauritania).

Steven Greer (Political) and Sierra Feser (Heads of State) were selected by the Faculty as the Outstanding Chairs and Pashion Israel (Social) received the Distinguished award. Hayley Gordon served as Secretary General.

Next year’s SERMAL will be March 15-17, 2024 at Converse.



National University Model

The National University Model Arab League (NUMAL) conference was held March 31-April 2, 2023 at George Washington University. Keynote speakers were Deputy Assistant Secretary for Israeli & Palestinian Affairs Andrew Miller, Dave DesRoches from the National Defense University, and Marc Lynch, from the Elliott School of George Washington University. The first-time site at GWU, a significant downgrade from the previous year's location at the Reagan Convention Center, had many logistics problems and I doubt that anyone would judge that the venue was a successful location. As the Converse faculty director, my illness prevented me from attending NUMAL for only the second time in 37 years at the conference.

At the Awards Ceremony, Converse University (Iraq) and Northeastern University (Comoros) were named the Outstanding Delegations. Georgia State University (Palestine) and the University of Wyoming (UAE) were cited as Distinguished Delegations. Angela Brobson (Converse), who chaired the Economics Affairs Council, was selected by the faculty as the Best Chair.

The 2024 National University Model will meet March 22-24 at a yet undetermined location.



Delegation at U.S. Capitol



Outstanding NUMAL Iraq Delegation



NUMAL 2023 Delegation at GWU



Jerome Harris excited about Award in Environmental Council

A Visit to the Spartanburg Masjid

by Joe Dunn

On Successful Drive, in the middle of what is sometimes referred to as the “buckle of the Christian Bible Belt” in conservative South Carolina sits the Masjid of the Spartanburg Muslim Alliance located in an attractive building with an eclectic group of surrounding neighbors. Directly across the street is a large public grade school with a very nice grounds and physical facilities. At the end of the block across the street are the spacious grounds of a former junior high school which now serves as the alternative school site for the local school district. On one side of the Masjid is a fire department building and on the other side is a private creative design company. Just beyond that is a Pentecostal Church.

I am teaching Islamic and Middle East Politics this term, and it seemed like an appropriate time to visit the mosque which I had passed by many times but never stopped. So on a pleasant Friday,

on a spur of the moment decision as I drove by, I pulled into the parking lot where I found the mosque administrator and we had a brief conversation before arrival for noon prayers.

Around 70 individuals may attend Friday noon prayers at the Masjid. A much small number do the other prayers of the day. The group is a mix of individuals of a wide range of nationalities and ethnicities. As the administrator remarked, “We have every color and background with a social-economic range from physicians, attorneys, and business executives to common labors.” The faithful come from a wide area with some driving for 30 miles or more. The next closest mosque is in Greenville, some 40 miles away. The administrator noted that several travelers, including long haul truckers will pull off the nearby Interstate to stop for prayers. I had noticed a large sixteen wheeler in the parking lot.



I am not used to encountering more than a very occasional “covered” woman in my daily life, even on a small college campus, so seeing several traditionally dressed women at the noon prayers was a reminder of an element that is not highly visible in the local community.

The mosque does not have a permanent imam. Various people perform the duties but it has an administrator to take care of the building.

Spartanburg has a rich tapestry of religious faiths, including Buddhists, Hindus, Bahai, Jews, Jehovah Witness, Mormons, Unitarians, and the whole range of so-called mainstream Christians in the Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant traditions. All contribute to a community of diversity and tolerance. The Spartanburg Muslim Alliance is an active member of the several religious community involvements and participates in ecumenical religious services for Thanksgiving and Martin Luther King Day celebrations.

In my many years of traveling in the Middle East, I have visited many mosques, but this was a different kind of more personal experience. I’m glad that I stopped in, and the next step is to accept the invitation to bring my students.



They Call Me a Lioness: A Palestinian Girl's Fight for Freedom

By Ahed Tamimi and Dena Takruri

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



This book has exploded in gaining international attention. Ahed Tamimi’s parents were Palestinian protestors, and she was engaged in this activity as a young child. She witnessed and participated in protests over the occupation of her West Bank village, Nabi Saleh, and the violence done toward resisters. Her father and mother were arrested many times and she witnessed her immediate family members, relatives, and neighbors shot, wounded, and killed by Israeli soldiers.

When her mother was arrested in August 2012, eleven-year-old Tamimi drew the praise from Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas for resisting the Israeli soldier and she gained international attention in the same year when the picture of her waving her fist at the soldier arresting her older brother went viral on social media. Three year later she was again highlighted for biting and striking a masked Israeli soldier who was arresting her younger brother. However, her global fame exploded when the fifteen-year-old slapped an Israeli soldier during a demonstration and she was arrested and subsequently at age sixteen was sentenced to prison for eight months. The book is a detailed account of historical and contemporary Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation, her experience in the military’s legal system, and her months in prison. Although hundreds of accounts of Palestinians under occupation, their resistance, and the brutal Israeli response are in print, this well-written testimony is one of

the clearest, gut-wrenching, and powerful. The fact of 8000 children detained and prosecuted by Israeli forces since 2010 is shocking.

Presently, a student of international law at Birzeit University on the West Bank and a global human rights celebrity, Tamimi is raising awareness of the realities of the Palestinian people under occupation. She is no fan of any of the present Palestinian leadership, whom she considers corrupt, inept, ineffective, and self-seeking, and she has no belief in the now dead two-state solution. Her call is for an end to the Zionist apartheid entity with a unitary secular state with the equal rights for all ethnicities and religions and freedom for the Palestinian people who have continued to suffer for more than a half century. Until that dream becomes a reality, naïve as it probably is, the struggle of the Palestinian people must continue. Tamimi’s passion and anger resonate throughout the volume.