

## **"LEADERSHIP TRAINING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST"**

### **I. The Program**

The overall goal of the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies (AIES) is to produce a cadre of Arab and Jewish environmental professionals and activists who not only understand environmental problems but are also committed to solving them in a regional context through non-violence and cooperation

As stated in our 2003 grant proposal, "The purpose of the proposed activity will be the promotion of peace and reconciliation in Israel and the surrounding countries by supporting inter-communal, regional solutions to common environmental problems facing all inhabitants of the Middle East."

To further this purpose, the AIES program aims to:

- Influence students' attitudes regarding their neighbors in the Middle East;
- Teach environmental studies from a regional perspective;
- Heighten program participants' awareness of the benefits of regional cooperation and reconciliation and:
- Engender commitment to these goals, acting as continued agents of change and influence in the Middle East.

### **II. Accomplishments**

*Please note this section is an outline of programming that was implemented at the Arava Institute for the duration of the program in the 2003-2004 academic year, including a brief description of each component. The "Successes" section outlines the successes of each component in said period in fulfilling these goals. The "Shortcomings" section will summarize program shortcomings and possible points for improvement.*

The programs and academic course work of the Arava Institute are specifically designed and implemented to meet the above stated goals. Our programs are comprised of interrelated and supporting components, including academic course work, experiential learning seminars, field trips and student life. In the 2003-2004 academic year, 33 students studied for a semester or full year at the Arava Institute: 25 from the Middle East (6 Jordanians, 4 Israeli Arabs, 3 Palestinians, and 12 Israeli Jews) as well as 8 North Americans.

The programming implemented this past academic year included:

**A. The Peace Environment Leadership Seminar (PELS) –** PELS is a compulsory (non-academic credit) component of the Arava Institute's Environmental Studies Program. The PELS addressed issues surrounding nationality, race, religion, and ethnicity in a safe, facilitated atmosphere in order to encourage open dialogue among the diverse student body.

Sessions explored differences related to nationality, race, religion, age, politics, region, language, identity and social norms. There was a focus on internal group dynamics, stereotypes, personal identity, discussions about politics and

coexistence, religion and "heritage" events including cuisine, music, poetry, and story telling.

In addition to the classes facilitated by the program coordinator, professionals and academic scholars, from the region, who specialize in coexistence and environmental justice fields, were invited to present their experiences. Several workshops were facilitated by experts in conflict resolution. Leadership training was also included in the schedule. This broad range of facilitators expanded the cultural content of the course and encouraged a thorough examination of the many aspects of conflict and cultural diversity.

Lastly, several field trips were incorporated into the PELS Course. These are detailed in section C below.

**B. Academic Course Work** - Below is a list of courses offered in the 2003-2004 academic year. Of special note are the interdisciplinary courses on environmental issues of regional significance: Water Management and Sustainable Development in an Arid Environment. Also of note for their specifically regional emphasis are courses in Comparative Law, Environmental Policy, and Mobility, Society and Environment.

<b>2003-2004 Course List</b>
Interdisciplinary Course- Water in the Middle East: Science, Policy, and Management
Interdisciplinary Course- Sustainable Development in an Arid Environment
Mobility, Society, and Environment
Comparative Environmental Law
Introduction to Environmental Policy
Methodologies for the Analysis of Environmental Issues
Independent Study in the Environment
Introduction to Ecology
Human Aspects in Environmental Studies
An Introduction to Evolutionary Theory
Introduction to Sustainable Agriculture
Organic Gardening
Desert Habitats: Miniature Ecosystems
Applied Sustainability: Introduction to Green Living
Sociology of Social Movements: The Case of Environmentalism
Introduction to Environmental Ethics
Introduction to Environmental Education
Introduction to Environmental Economics
Geographical Information Systems for Environmental Applications

**C. Field Trips** - Within the framework of the academic program, all students participated in field trips that took them out of the classroom and connected them with real time issues, consequently deepening their connections to environmental issues in Israel and the Middle East with an emphasis on efforts to prevent and reduce these problems. During these trips, the group also visited organizations that specialize in coexistence and conflict resolution. They participated in various activities throughout Israel as part of the PELS. These visits emphasized the

complexities associated with coexistence projects in the region and encouraged the students to examine the impact of the Arab-Israeli conflict on different areas of society.

Field Trips taken in the 2003-2004 academic year included the following trips and academic emphases:

Trip, Semester	Academic Emphases
Local Day trips, year round	Familiarity with the desert and with local environmental issues.
Negev, fall 2003	Sustainable Negev- Jewish and Bedouin communities - settlement, economy and development
Aqaba, Jordan, fall, 2003	Case Study: Master Plan for Sustainable Development of the area of Aqaba and Wadi Araba
Haifa and the Carmel Mountain, fall, 2003	Analysis of private and public measures for nature preservation
Galilee- Golan trip, spring, 2004	Water Use and Management in the Northern Jordan River Watershed
Central Region, spring, 2004	Water Use and Management in the Central Watershed- including Dead Sea and coastal (Tel Aviv) regions
Jerusalem, Spring, 2004	Separation Fence study trip: programmed and organized by the students as part of the PELS program

**D. Student Life** – Part of the program's intensity as well as its' successes stemmed from the simple fact of students living together for a year. Students lived together in a small campus, sharing dormitory rooms and lounges. Their meals were taken together in the kibbutz dining room. Cultural activities were organized by the Student Life Coordinator and by the students themselves. As opposed to an urban university campus, the Arava Institute's relatively remote desert surroundings enabled the students to spend their free time mainly with each other and not separate out into segregated cultural groups within a larger urban environment. Students learned that certain issues are shared by all students regardless of nationality, religion, age or political views.

The simple fact of living and studying together went far in bridging gaps and breaking down stereotypes. The quantity and intense quality of interactive time together created long-term bonds of friendship that will help bridge the gaps between these peoples of the Middle East upon return to their home communities.

### **III. Successes**

The Arava Institute for Environmental Studies was successful in achieving its program goals in the 2003-2004 academic year.

The changes in student attitudes as the result of this program were measured by entry, mid-year and end of year surveys that will be reported on in an annex to this report.

Program success was measured during the year with written course evaluations (end term), oral individual academic evaluation (mid term), oral group academic evaluation (year end), written PELS evaluations (end term), oral PELS summary session as group (end term), and written evaluations for each field trip.

Below is a survey of the successes of each program component in the past year.

**1. The Peace Environment Leadership Seminar** – In end of year evaluations, students cited their PELS experience as being highly meaningful in their personal development over the year. The experience was often painful, highlighting differences between the students in order to work them out. The students often expressed a conflict-avoidance preference – “We like each other, let’s just be friends”. Yet, ultimately, in order to achieve program goals, participants were made aware of each other’s issues and difficulties as well as similarities. “The program put a finger on the pain. We learned the pain in order to work in cooperation for the future.” (Abdel Rouf, male Jordanian student, in final academic evaluation)

The PELS program provided a safe learning and encounter environment for participants to explore political and cultural differences and similarities in a deep and meaningful way.

... the Peacebuilding and Leadership Seminar was my first time to talk about politics in a comfortable way - I never was involved in politics and I was not one to express my political opinions before - not in university and not in my family. Here it was comfortable because you feel like you are expressing an opinion in order for people to hear you and understand you and not so that you will be attacked. (Hadeel Mageed, female Israeli Arab graduate student, written evaluation)

This year’s group became involved in programming and took great initiatives in their PELS program. They organized student-run multi-cultural activities, student-led study sessions on relevant current events. Most notably, students organized the Separation Fence study trip, which focused on one of the most difficult co-existence and environmental issues of the region.

Programs of the PELS of particular success included:

- A facilitated session run by Dr. Sami Adwan of Bethlehem University and Dr. Dan Oron of Ben Gurion University, the writers of a textbook history of both national narratives. They looked at Israel Independence Day/ Naqbe with the students and discussed the impact of narratives and education in our notions of the other. (fall semester)
- Issues of Environmental Justice, especially an introductory lecture by Jeremy Benstein and follow-up on Bedouin Rights issues on the Negev Field trip. (fall semester)
- “New Profile” facilitated a session on the impact of militarization on society as it affects gender relations as well as Arab-Israeli relations. (fall semester) This session was cited as giving the participants an understanding of issues involved on a new and different level.
- Special programs concerning Israel Independence/ Naqbe and Holocaust Memorial Day had formal and informal components. (spring semester) The informal components were student-run “cultural” sharing events initiated to continue processing issues and concerns that “spilled-over” from the formal externally facilitated component. These events were highly successful in

providing a valve of cultural sharing from and of the difficult issues raised in the formal components. This year's students were particularly successful, with the guidance of the AIES PELS program coordinator, in channeling their differences and difficulties into productive venues.

A major sign of success of this past year's program was the high level of student involvement and responsibility for the program. Students prepared the Separation Fence Study trip as part of their PELS experience including research preparation and presentations to the group as a whole in preparation for the trip. Such independently initiated research presentations included a presentation on the architectural aspects of separation walls worldwide and a presentation on the structure and history of the Palestinian Authority. This was not for credit research done explicitly at the students' initiative (with staff guidance) for the purpose of enriching their PELS experience.

This year's PELS program was a highly successful combination of externally facilitated encounter experiences, lectures, field trip components, and student initiative. We find that even students who find the experience most difficult as they are participating become more aware of the program component's value as time progresses. PELS successfully starts a personal process that does not end with the program's end.

"They had to drag me to [PELS]. It was emotionally draining. Not only do you have to talk about your views, but you have to try to understand other people and keep an open mind. That is too much for me. Now I appreciate the staffs' insistence on this. I was enriched..." (Dana Rassas, female Moslem Jordanian graduate, personal interview)

"It is hard to hear and accept the other side. Sometimes we both found ourselves accusing, but other times, getting to an understanding, and above all accepting that the decision making is not in our hands. But the most special thing is that we built a friendship of trust." (Shira Leon, female Jewish Israeli undergraduate, PELS evaluation)

## **2. Academic Course Work-**

AIES's graduate studies program is becoming an increasingly attractive option for Middle Eastern graduate students. Eight students in the past year are enrolled in our master's program with the Albert Katz International School for Desert Studies at Ben Gurion University, including the first Jordanian student to attend the program. An additional six students plan to continue master's studies. Further, we have just begun a connection with the Palestinian Al Quds University, with a first pioneer graduate student attending AIES' s program in the Fall 2003 semester.

In evaluations, students praised the academic program citing it as challenging and enriching. Frequent favorable comments were made about the interdisciplinary approach in which students are exposed to a well-rounded combination of science and humanities course work in environmental fields. "The holistic approach to problem solving is possibly the most significant academic contribution of the program." (Galya Randor Sippos, female International undergraduate student, academic evaluation). "The interdisciplinary approach added greatly to my academic experience." (Noa Milman, female Jewish Israeli graduate student, academic evaluation)

The Students cited the approachable and supportive style and high level of commitment of the faculty. Student participation in classes was also favorably noted during the academic evaluation session.

Further, interactive learning methods were particularly successful. The connection between course content and field trip content supplemented the learning experience of each. Of particular note, most students' praised the interdisciplinary water management course as adding much educational content on issues of conflict in the region. Specifically commended from this course was a series of advanced role play sessions on water negotiation topics in which students were assigned to research and play roles not their own (ie. Palestinians playing Israelis, Israelis- Jordanians, etc.)

Another positively noted aspect of the academic program was its hands-on nature. Courses also included actual work in the areas learned such as Organics and fieldwork in Desert Habitats and Evolution. This approach applied to other subjects as well, where direct contact with professionals and activists working in the studied fields was encouraged.

Independent Study was a required course for all students for one semester. Independent Study enabled students to delve into specific research areas that greatly enriched their academic experience. Independent Study subjects over the past year have covered a wide range of topics, from the highly scientific, such as: the "Effect of extracts from *Inula viscosa* and *Nicotiana glauca* on the growth of aphids" and the effects of global warming on bird migration; through to policy and other current issues, such as: various Environmental Education projects, Environmental issues surrounding Bedouin Land Rights, the proposed Red Sea-Dead Sea Canal Project in Jordan, The Israeli Environmental Movement and the Separation Fence, Nabatean Water Well Systems, and an investigation into Urban Planning issues in Eilat.

**3. Field Trips** – The experiential aspect of the Field Trips, which included location relevant lectures and fieldwork, made them a highly successful component of the program. Trips exposed participants to cultural differences, notably home-hospitality in Arab students' homes in Aqaba and the Galilee, and a Jewish student's home in Mivasseret Zion near Jerusalem. Home hospitality was cited as both enjoyable and an educationally important part of cultural understanding for group participants.

Particularly successful trip segments this past year included the Aqaba trip, visits and study of Bedouin un-recognized villages in the Negev, and the Separation Fence study trip.

The Aqaba trip included meetings with Aqaba officials on sustainable urban development, home hospitality, and meeting with NGO representatives, including an AIES graduate. It was a very rewarding and inspiring visit.

The Negev Field Trip included lectures and visits focusing on environmental justice issues and land rights of the Bedouins.

"... as I served in Hatzetim air force base in the Negev, I must have driven past countless Bedouin villages but never really stopped to think what it's like to live in one or what problems these communities face.

By the time we left, I felt enriched and truly privileged to have been invited into these wonderful peoples homes, to have gained a minute but significant glance into their culture, their way of life, its trials and challenges, the discrimination they are exposed to and their fight for justice. I left inspired by the work of those who try to make changes and

help the Bedouins achieve a better standard of living, enough to try myself to join in and work towards a better future for all the residents of Israel despite their race or religion." (Ilana Malleam, female Jewish Israeli graduate student, field trip evaluation + personal comments)

The Separation Fence study trip was noteworthy in that it was a student initiated and run field trip. The PELS student steering committee, together with the PELS program coordinator, designed an intensive two-day learning experience in the Jerusalem area. This segment was cited repeatedly as a meaningful and educationally invaluable trip.

4. Student Life – The true success of student life as a program component can best be expressed by the following compelling story told by two students from the spring semester:

Together, Roe (a male Jewish Israeli graduate student) and Dawlah (a female religious Moslem Jordanian graduate student) tell an interesting story. When Roe came to the Institute, it was the first time he ever saw a woman wearing Hijab (Moslem head covering) up close and personal. He wasn't sure what to think, and he was a little in shock that someone "that religious" could come to study at a place like AIES. He wasn't sure how to handle it. Little by little he got to know Dawlah and stopped noticing the Hijab. He developed a strong respect for her knowledge and opinions. He grew to be her friend, and stopped seeing the Hijab – seeing Dawlah instead.

A few weeks later, Dawlah was coming out of her room. She saw an Israeli soldier walking onto the campus. Out of fear and dread, she pulled her door closed and hid inside. All of her contact with soldiers had been at checkpoints, and had been unpleasant – humiliating and she could not take it. Later after he had changed into regular clothes, she realized it was Roe, having returned from his reserve duty. He heard that she had been frightened of him and came to speak with her. She realized that inside the uniform was her friend Roe who she could respect and talk openly with.

They laughed together and remarked how concrete and convincing their experience was...how they learned not to judge by how someone looks - how one could have, along with the identity of an Israeli Soldier or an observant, Moslem Woman, a personality and opinions and a whole world inside the costume.

A large component of success for the AIES program was based on the independent and direct relationships students have with one another. One example of cross-cultural exchange initiated independently by this past year's students was their weekly "Kabbalat Shabbat" – singing of songs in Hebrew, Arabic and English to celebrate the Jewish Sabbath of Friday night, with drums and, in respect for the Moslem students, with no alcohol.

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On the foundation of the students' strong interpersonal relations – living, studying, and celebrating together - our program adds inter-connecting layers of academic course work and reconciliation and cooperation training.

These four elements- academics, experiential fieldwork, peace leadership seminars, and student life – are interdependent for true program success. Experiences and learning in each area build one upon the other.

#### **IV. Shortcomings**

##### **Main long run & general program shortcomings include:**

-The lack of a critical mass of student numbers. Ideally, the program will ultimately include 60 students from all backgrounds of the Middle East and abroad. Such a larger and more diverse student body would greatly enrich the program, further fulfilling goals of diversity and awareness of different cultures and peoples in the region. Increased scholarship funds, expanded housing and classroom facilities would be necessary to implement this objective.

- For Middle Eastern students, their financial situation is a major stumbling block. Even with scholarships, many families cannot afford the income loss incurred when their family members (be they parents or children) are studying. The main obstacle for increasing the number of Middle Eastern participants is the need for more scholarships and stipends for this purpose.

- The need for greater course selection and variety was cited, especially by graduate students in the spring semester, as a program shortcoming. A larger student body would enable us to offer a larger course selection by ensuring a viable minimum class size.

- Library resources are not yet to full university standards. Further, computer space is already limited for the current student population size and would need to be expanded.

The ongoing effort to increase program resources aims to solve these shortcomings in the long run.

##### **Immediate range program shortcomings**

From student evaluations of the past year, two additional comments specifically regarding the PEELS component have been noted:

- After fall semester, some students requested increased student involvement in the planning and implementation of the Peace and Environmental Leadership Seminars component of the program. Our staff implemented some of their suggestions in the spring semester, starting with the establishment of a student steering committee for the PEELS. In the spring PEELS evaluations, students praised the increased student initiative and planning of the Separation Fence study trip, for example, as particularly empowering. The PEELS staff is working to implement student input into the program. Nonetheless, the importance of facilitated PEELS sessions is paramount. This will be balanced with the desire to give the students a sense of empowerment and ownership of the process.

- There was some criticism regarding particular external facilitators who were felt to bring more divisiveness than convergence to the group dynamics. These highly professional facilitators work normally with Arab – Jewish Israeli groups. Our student population is older, more diverse, more international and with more multi-identities than these facilitators' normal group work. Some of the facilitators'

methods of dividing the group per pre-defined identities were not appropriate in this context. (For example, a Palestinian who grew up in Kuwait and moved later to Jordan, was hard-pressed which of the session's identity sub-groups to join.) However, as previously mentioned, there is great value in highlighting differences to work through and not gloss over them. Students tend to prefer to avoid some of the painful aspects of reconciliation work, yet the importance of working through it should not be underestimated. Therefore, while some students felt the program work with these facilitators should not be continued, we have not come to that conclusion. Rather, we are currently discussing an alternative methodology for this aspect of the PELS program.

## V. Conclusions

We would like to thank the government of the United States for the generosity of the USAID grant which has enabled AIES to complete a highly successful program year during challenging and difficult times in our Region.

In conclusion, the student participants speak for themselves:

"...any onlooker must have been confused at such an unusual sight; Jordanian Moslems and Christians, Israeli Jews and Arabs, Palestinians and Americans all in one cohesive group. The dynamic within oblivious to differences of identity, we had spent the last 4-8 months living and studying together, we interact naturally as friends do, but are strengthened by our common goal to protect the environment and simultaneously promote co-operation, tolerance and respect. (Ilana Malleam, female Jewish Israeli graduate student, personal comments on the Environmental Leadership Exchange/ ELE Seminar in Washington DC, July 2004)

"We students, both Arabs and Israelis, still disagreed on much, but that despite our struggles the dialogue was necessary. We have to talk because we are environmentalists. The air and the water don't know borders. A good environment needs a stable political situation and turning our backs on what is happening will not change anything." (Mohammed Taher, male Moslem Jordanian graduate student, personal comments, final evaluation, spring semester)

"I came to the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies (AIES) with hope I could make steps toward peace, or perhaps make it closer to be ever possible. But the main reason I came there was to study the environment, through an interdisciplinary and a regional, rather than national approach. Never had I imagined that my experience there could change my life as it did." (Shira Leon, female Jewish Israeli undergraduate, personal comments)

"I now understand that Arabs and Jews have strong connections to the land and a strong will to survive as a people; I also understand that the solution will have to be creative and complex.

As a graduate of the AIES program, I believe that by meeting each other and working together we can find a way. I know that me and my classmates here are committed to trying." (Dawla Abu Dwaih, female Jewish Palestinian/Jordanian graduate student, final evaluation, spring semester)

## **Student Survey Final Report**

To: Elisabeth Kvitashvili, Director  
From: Dr. Sasson and Dr. Lipchin  
Re: Final report on evaluation of AIES program  
Date: August 20, 2004

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We write to describe the final results of our AIES program evaluation. We interviewed all students completing the Institute's residential program during the last week of the spring semester. In order to assess the attitudinal changes of the students since beginning their studies we asked a series of open ended questions to each student. The questions are included at the end of this report.

From our interim report, we described that the participants came to the Arava Institute to learn about environmental problems, become more effective activists, and experience life in a diverse community of Jews and Arabs on a kibbutz. Students came to the Institute for rigorous study of the environment, to foster and experience co-existence across lines of conflict, and to enhance their effectiveness as environmental activists. These sentiments were enhanced at the end of the program but tempered by pragmatism based on the students' experiences both in and outside of the classroom. Throughout the program, the students' zeal for co-existence waxed and waned but it always remained a core of their experience. Independent of ethnicity and/or nationality, the majority of students welcomed the struggles they faced in interacting with someone not from their own background. In fact, for many, the interactions between Arab and Jew are the experiences most fondly recalled by the students.

The influence of the AIES experience on the attitudes and feelings of participants is in part related to their various starting points. For those beginning the year with a relatively low level of personal commitment to peace and co-existence activism (i.e. those for

whom environmental studies at AIES was the exclusive draw as expressed by some Israeli and North American students) the experience living in a mixed community and engaging in ongoing dialogue over the sources of conflict proved transformative. By and large, these students report learning the narratives of the “other” and discovering their common humanity. They report a high level of commitment to ongoing co-existence activism of one sort or another.

For students arriving at AIES with a high degree of commitment to and prior engagement in peace or conflict resolution activism, the experience here helped to solidify and consolidate a pro-coexistence orientation. In several notable cases, such consolidation included integration of disconcerting information. For example, several of the female North American and Israeli participants complained about what they regard as the discriminatory treatment of Arab women by Arab men. One Arab-Israeli woman, on the other hand, learned that discrimination against Arab-Israelis is a far more serious problem than she had imagined. In each of these cases, the students in question report an ongoing commitment to further activism on behalf of co-existence, albeit with less rose-tinted glasses.

The AIES experience does not depend upon or cultivate a single political line on the conflicts of the region. Entering students embrace a variety of political perspectives extending from right to left and including secular and religious perspectives. They conclude the program with a heightened commitment to finding ways to live with their counterparts and to taking action to advance the cause of peace. They do not leave, however, with a single recipe for ending the conflicts in the region. Indeed, they tend to be realistic about the chances for near-term conflict resolution and sensitive to the existence of a wide variety of perspectives among people equally committed to justice and peace.

Students identify the AIES’ focus on common responsibility for a shared natural environment as a key to its success in its co-existence programming. They appreciate that the focus on the environment makes it possible to attract mainstream as well as

students from the left and right, and thereby make the co-existence work more challenging as well as more constructive and significant. Indeed, the students regard the focus on the environment (and not the Arab-Israeli conflict) as the single most important factor contributing to the program's success.

The AIES experience deepens all of the participants' commitments to expanding their friendships and acquaintances within the circles of their opposite number. Over the course of the year, and in the summer months that followed it, many of the AIES students elected to travel together in Jordan, Egypt and Israel. Indeed, it is these ties that extend beyond the time that one spends at the AIES that attest to the success of the co-existence programming. An example of this is the alumni network and the activities of our alumni in varied fields both in the Middle East and abroad.

## **Student Survey**

### **End of Year Questions:**

1. People come to AIES to learn about the environment, to become better activists, to improve their resume and to experience life in a diverse community of students throughout the Middle East and North America. Thinking back on your decision to enroll, what then was the most important aspect of the program? What attracted you most? And now, today, looking back on the year, what would you say is the most valuable part of the experience?
2. Thinking back on the time before you came, how did you feel about the idea of living, studying and socializing in a mixed community of Arabs and Jews? Now, looking back on the year, do you believe that living in a mixed community has been a positive or a negative experience? How so?
3. Also, thinking back how did your family and friends feel about your participation in this program? Were they supportive? How about today?
4. Do you think that your participation in the program has changed your views on the chances for peace between Jews and Arabs? [Follow up: can you think of specific occurrences or conversations over the course of the year that is especially responsible for the change?]
5. In general, do you believe that programs like this one have something positive to contribute in relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict?
6. What so far, for you, have been the best and worst parts of the AIES experience?