

Participants' Reviews - Summer 2012



"From my previous experience at the UN headquarter to the field visits (Gaza Strip, West Bank, and other borders) I gained first-hand experience of what is happening in the real world. Not what politicians say, but what people say! I heard narratives from both Israeli and Palestinian families who lost their beloved ones in conflict, young soldiers, and more. We really got to experience the human side of the conflict."

Tinghua Zhou

PhD candidate, Monash University & United Nations intern and roster, China



"Two words: Life Changing. I think the program exceeded my expectations in every way. I was consistently blown away by the access we were given to prestigious individuals and institutions at the very center of the political, religious, and cultural life of Israel. It was a once in a life time opportunity to achieve access to the inner workings of a special country on a global scale. I came hoping to learn the "facts" and pick a side based on an educated understanding but what I learned through the course is that this is an incredibly complex conflict in which both sides have made poor decisions but all are hurting. I realized the path to coexistence is not picking sides of right and wrong but putting history behind and moving forward to reconciliation. This course will continue to shape and transform the way that I approach politics, faith, and activism long into the future."

Angel Collie

Masters of Divinity, Yale University, USA



"The coexistence trip exceeded all my expectations by far. As a history and politics student I thought I already knew a lot about the Israel-Palestine conflict, however, the month really opened my eyes to a whole new side away from the books and the theory. Meeting people at the heart of the conflict from young Israeli soldiers, students and bereaved families to diplomats and religious leaders really brought home the complexity of the situation. Being based in Jerusalem offered a unique cultural, historical, and political experience. The field trips provided a dynamic way to get to grips with the conflict as well as a chance to see the many other amazing sights that Israel has to offer. Being able to share these experiences with new friends from around the world and hear their opinions on the issues being discussed. All in all it was a month that I will never forget and that will undoubtedly continue to shape my future opinions on the conflict and coexistence."

Laura Bonney

BA History and Politics, Oxford University, UK



"The program provides excellent exposure to the issues facing present-day Israel. It offers an invaluable opportunity to travel all over the country guided by academic staff and professional tour guides. Our visits to the Golan Heights, the border with Lebanon, and an Israeli military base near Gaza all stand out. Furthermore, the program had access to a huge range of interesting people - Israelis, Palestinians, people from peace initiatives etc., but also an Egyptian Diplomat, a spokesman at the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Rabbi of the Western Wall and the Islamic cleric of Jerusalem. Insurance concerns and university laws prevented us from visiting any Palestinian towns or cities in the West Bank, which certainly skewed the material in the program (but you can visit them in your spare time). The course did an admirable job of trying to be balanced, given the limits it faced. I would recommend it to any potential student for its exposure to a wide variety of people, places and ideas."

Dougal Robinson

BA Government, University of Sydney, Australia

Participants' Reviews - Summer 2012



there looking to be wowed and looking for a challenge."

"I never thought a simple university course abroad could have such a powerful emotional, educational, and spiritual impact on a person. The diverse insights and knowledge brought to the table by our wonderful professors and now friends, as well as the many field-trips taken and impressive selection of guests, presenters, and officials, were simultaneously captivating, surprising, intimidating, and touching. They could not have picked a better team of instructors to guide us and a better array of excursions and speakers to challenge what we already know and think! I've come out of this with new views and opinions and have begun to look at the situation in Israel-Palestine from a humanistic approach rather than a political, social, or economic one. I have absolutely no reservations recommending this course to everyone out

Hana Kokanovic

MA Public & International Affairs, University of Ottawa, Canada



any other class I've ever taken. The sheer amount of primary sources it gleans is a testament to its facilitators. Thank you all."

"An amazing experience! I have never had a class like this before and it will stay with me forever. I enjoyed every minute of it. 'Coexistence in the Middle East' allows you to physically meet (and more importantly question) the people that are the crux of the issues. You may not agree with all or even most of them but you'll understand where they are coming from. However, this again depends on how much you put in and if you ask probing questions. Unfortunately, for insurance reasons I imagine, the serious issues like Hebron, Silwan, Refugee Camps and the Nakba could not be physically visited to provide a more balanced picture. That's why, while it is a great learning opportunity for those who have no background on the matter, it is an even richer experience for those who do as they can ask more probing questions of the exceptional speakers. All in all, 'Coexistence in the Middle East' is truly unlike

Osama Jamil Butt

BA Political Science, York University, Pakistan



"The experiences I've had here cannot be simulated anywhere else and that's what makes the experience so unique. I believe that this course is the only one of its kind in the world given the range of speakers and sights. Here, the whole of Israel becomes your classroom and the amount of things that one can learn is limitless. Personally, I've learned a lot about patience, tolerance, compassion, and concession from watching politicians, activists, and locals struggle each day with fixing old wrongs and finding new ways to coexist. This is definitely a jewel of an opportunity!"

Valeria Ryrak

BA English Literature, University of Toronto, Ukraine



"Being in Israel and participating in the program has deeply impacted the way I see things. Being in a wonderful country like Israel meant to be in contact with people who I admire and which are at the center of convergence of different views, religions, and idiosyncrasies. It was amazing to see how a country can be so attached to their history yet so innovative, so modern without neglecting spirituality, and especially believe in the future of humanity despite having seen the worst of it. It never ceases to amaze me positively that the people of Israel have the mission to enlighten the humanity."

Cesar Sabas

BA International Studies, UCV, Venezuela

Participants' Reviews - Summer 2012



"This experience was much more than a summer course; it changes your entire vision of the world. It lets you see the differences between cultures and the situations around the world, learn about the current conflict, and hear the people involved. That's not all, meeting people from all around the world and sharing this experience together is amazing. I recommend this summer course to everyone who loves traveling, meeting people, learning about different cultures, seeing different approaches towards the same topic, and of course people who love to get outside of their comfort zone."

Jeziret Sahadi Gonzalez Gallardo

BA Geography, UNAM, Mexico



"The Coexistence class is too unique to even be called a class. You're always learning and you will constantly be challenged, but it is definitely better explained as an experience. You get to explore Israel in a way that most people never will. Spending most of your time outside of the classroom, you're not just seeing the Western Wall; you're meeting the Rabbi of the Western Wall to hear his thoughts on religious diversity. You're not just seeing the wall between Israel and the West Bank; you're getting to ask the man who planned it how he feels about it. You learn so much about yourself. Your class is made up of bright, energetic, and vastly different people who will constantly push you to discover where your perspective comes from. They help you realize that the desire you have for coexistence is not one that you stand alone in, while simultaneously challenging your opinions about the means by which we can achieve it. This experience will help you realize just how deeply diverse humanity is and, as a result, how deeply diverse the opportunities and solutions are for Coexistence in the Middle East."

Lindsey Becker

Master of Divinity, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, USA



"Through this summer course I could learn a lot. I have not studied about peace conflict or political science. But in the course I still learned a lot about Israel and the relationship between Israel and other Arab countries. This course is full of field work, which made it easy and interesting to understand. I really appreciate the people who organized this course"

Shoko Niimi

BA Foreign Language French, Sophia University, Japan



"I came to the program with a memory of losses, and now after this experience of one month I have learned to focus not on what I have lost, but in fact to concentrate on the gains and the chances life presents to us. Through this program I have met people from all over the world who all share the vision of coexistence, I have gained perspectives of people who are struggling amidst a very difficult conflict, and more importantly I have grown personally. I must now make the accumulated knowledge flourish into something that will benefit my community at large. I know for sure that this program has helped me grow in many different ways, many of which I have yet to understand, as after a month of 'listening to stories' I will require a period of time to absorb all the information."

Ksenia Kokareva

BA International Relations, University of Toronto, Russia

Participants' Reviews - Summer 2012



"The thing I like the most is to be able to live this experience first-hand. To actually go and visit the places where the conflict exists or the places where all the stories told in the books really happened. Reading a book is so different from seeing it in person. This experience allowed me to see it first-hand instead of trying to understand it by reading about it in a book."

Donata Ling

BA Kinesiology, McMaster University, Hong Kong



"This course definitely differs from most other summer school programs one may find on the globe, not only because it is set in such an amazing and diverse area, but also because it approaches the object to be studied in a completely different manner. Its approach is experimental, which is completely necessary when dealing with such complexity as is attempted. While an interdisciplinary approach allows for different view points to be multiplexed, this course takes it further by actually putting the students as close to those view points as possible. All in all I highly recommend this course. It really is one of the best ways to see many places that people usually don't have a chance to visit. It really is a beautiful region, and such a fascinating cultural crossroad."

Mads Eriksen

BA European Studies & Political Science, University of Oslo, Norway



"It was a great experience and I have met a lot of interesting people who took part as participants or who shared with us their point of view. Moreover, I have seen fascinating places and learned more about their history and magic to other people. "

Jana Andrea Schreiber

BA European Studies, Universiteit Twente, Germany



"I stated at the beginning that I came to Israel to learn, and I have certainly learned a great deal from being in this course. I have met wonderful and fascinating people who are doing inspiring work in the area of coexistence, and I have also become more aware of the many complicated obstacles to making coexistence work in this context. The staff was very helpful and engaging, and I enjoyed getting to know several of the participants. A very enjoyable and rewarding experience!"

Stephen Innes

PhD. Philosophy of Religion, King's College London, USA



"I am very happy about the variety of field trips in the program and how we got to meet so many different representatives from different institutions and organizations. I like the fact that the days are long and packed with interesting lectures."

Sofia Persson

MA Sustainability, Lund University, Sweden

Participants' Reviews - Summer 2012



"A truly remarkable and enjoyable program! I embarked on this breathtaking journey of coexistence with a malleable state of mind, ready to challenge preconceived notions. Indeed, I left with no regrets, a greater appreciation for peace, coexistence, and dialogue. I also applaud the balance of perspectives offered by different activists, officials and NGOs. The program is suitable for participants from all backgrounds; the learning value depends on what the participants want to make of it, but enough guidance and instruction are provided to ensure an overall positive experience for even the most and least educated participant. What completed this journey are the strong friendships and connections I made, making this an unforgettable milestone in my life."

Jiexun Liao

BA Peace & Conflict Studies, University of Toronto, Singapore



"I chose to participate in the Coexistence in the Middle East course because I really wanted to learn about both sides of the conflict; not just by sitting in the classroom and reading text, but by talking to the people that live it on the ground every day. The speakers all came from a different spectrum of Israeli culture, and we were able to get a relatively balanced view of the situation. I came out of this course with a greater understanding of what drives the policy decisions and the people's choices about the conflict. I left wanting to know more and I hope to learn more about its complexity and many-faceted issues and opinions in my future studies. The coexistence trip has inspired me to learn all I can and has only further piqued my interest in the region. It was the experience of a lifetime and a defining summer in my life in terms of helping me determine what I wish to pursue for a future career and post-graduate studies."

Sarah Gentry

BA International Studies, University of North Carolina, USA



"In other courses you are usually sitting in a classroom but in this course we literally went to every corner of Israel. A picture is worth a 1000 words so if you are actually going and seeing things in person, it gives you a completely different impression. I've taken many courses that dealt with the Middle East and just by being here a month my impression is completely different from what it was before. So having the opportunity of seeing all these places, seeing the Lebanese border, speaking to a former mayor of a city that had been bombed and speaking to people seeking dialogue on both sides is extremely beneficial compared to sitting in a classroom. Doing things in practice rather than just in theory is really valuable. I highly recommend it because when you leave, your opinion will be very different from what it was when you came here."

Trevor Foster

MA Public and International Affairs, University of Ottawa, Canada



"The program is a remarkable opportunity for anyone who is interested in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. As a graduate student enrolled in a Middle Eastern studies degree, I had several preconceived notions of what I was about to encounter before arriving in Israel and I'm happy to say that this program challenged everything of what I once assumed. You can only really understand the geographical, social, and religious dimensions of the situation once you're there. Nothing you read will ever give you the grasp of what is really going on in the ground level, and that in my opinion, is the main asset of this program. I would like to point out that although the program makes its best to portray both sides of the matter, I still felt that we missed more on the Palestinian side because of insurance restrictions. I would definitely say that one of the most enriching aspects of the program is the encounter with people from all over the world, who soon become your friends, and with whom you might or might not share the same opinion. Coming across the most radically opposite points of view and trying to understand where they come from made this program one of the best experiences in my academic formation."

Marisol Ruiz

MA Middle Eastern Studies, Colegio de México, Mexico

Participants' Reviews - Summer 2012



"What we shouldn't forget from this summer course is patience and trust. Patience to hear the other side of the story before making up our mind and patience to hear an even more impressive story with every field trip. Trust the people talking to us to be sincere, though we may not agree with them. Their facts may be off, but their intentions count; everyone wants the conflict to be solved, if only people trusted each other enough to be helpful. Lastly, we cannot forget the friends we have made and wish we didn't have to say goodbye to them, yet..."

Judith Romkes

BA Humanities, University College Utrecht, Netherlands



"It is not often that I get the opportunity of studying Jewish, Christian, Muslim relations in the Holiest Land in the world. The four weeks that I shared with mentors and students has allowed me to open my eyes to the many different perspectives that surround the conflict in the Middle East. This program has given me the ability to study the history of Israel through multiple lenses, which led me to believe that through inclusion and not exclusion, inter-religious plurality can be met. The bonds that were forged with people from various religions, cultures, and countries are lifelong relationships. This program influences personal, devotional, and endearing relationships with the people around you. It focuses on what unites us as opposed to what divides us. To be able to coexist for a month in a place like Israel, which is the center of the three monotheistic religions, is to sincerely appreciate and value everything that this program has to offer. My life will be forever changed."

Andrew Luisi

BA Religion & Philosophy, Wake Forest University, USA



"I can testify that the course played a pivotal role for both myself and others who were interested in learning about the conflict. The class allowed students to question dominant ideologies and become active in talking to both Israeli's and Palestinians outside of the classroom about issues we learned about in our trips. In addition to our learning, we were able to benefit from amazing opportunities that added to the quality of our experience in Israel. Camping in the desert, climbing Masada, visiting checkpoints, and the Gaza observation point for instance were some of my most memorable. As much as I loved the class, I would recommend having more representation from the West Bank so that the voices of those on the other side of the fence can be heard and so that students can obtain more information pertaining to the conflict. However, without reservation, I would recommend this class to any student interested in studying the conflict or looking to learn more about it."

Laura-May Roth

MA Public & International Affairs, University of Ottawa, Canada



"We had an amazing opportunity to meet people that we would never have the chance to meet otherwise, as well as to travel all over the country. The combination of these two things has definitely broadened my understanding. There is nothing like being on the ground and talking to people who are living with the conflict every day. I have studied this area before at school and I have always been fascinated by it, but there is something really unique about talking to someone who is in Sderot and is under rocket fire, or talking to Palestinians who have to wait hours every day to get to work. It takes away the academic aspect and provides a real life perspective that you are not going to find anywhere else."

Zane Schwartz

BA International Relations, University of Toronto, Canada

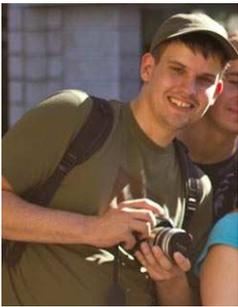
Participants' Reviews - Summer 2012



"'Coexistence in the Middle East' was such a great way to spend my summer. Being in Israel was amazing! Historically and culturally there is so much to see, and it's a great place to see coexistence and the lack thereof in action. The program was set up in a way that we were always going somewhere on a field trip instead of just sitting in a classroom. I learned about the conflict in new ways, and my mind was opened. In fact, the course inspired me to take extra classes and add a Peace and Conflict studies concentration to my university major. Not only did I learn a lot, but I met wonderful people from all over the world, made friends, and had a lot of fun. I would recommend this program to anyone."

Abigail Hudson

BA Psychology, Oberlin College, USA



"'Coexistence in the Middle East' is a unique program that enabled me to see the conflict, but also the people and their stories from different perspectives. I think one can apply the knowledge I gained here not only for this particular situation but for many other situations as well."

Jan-Hinrich Spaeth

BA European Studies, Universiteit Twente, Germany



"I participated in the Coexistence Trip to better understand the emotions and experience of locals that are in the middle of this conflict. I wanted to learn more about the conflict because I will be a volunteer in the West Bank and other regions in the Middle East, and I wanted to be proven wrong about what the media has said. The biggest thing that changed my perspective was that the media tends to oversimplify the complexity and sensitivity of the conflict. I recommend this trip to anyone interested in looking into deeply tangled societal customs and conflicts between religious, cultural, and political customs.... and if you just want to experience history instead of just to read about it!"

Greta Anderson

BA Graphic Design, University of Bridgeport, USA



"The Coexistence in the Middle East program was a fascinating experience with academically intense lectures alongside fun and interactive field trips. I recommend enrolling in the program in order to both study the Arab-Israeli conflict but also to see the personal dynamics of Arab and Israeli society on the ground."

Jozef Kosc

BA Political Science, University of Toronto, Canada



"Thanks Israel, thanks to the coexistence program, being here was a life lesson. Hearing the testimonies of the people and analyzing the situation from within have opened my eyes and left me with the task of teaching what I experienced here."

Adriana Maria Perez Benitez

BA Environmental Engineering, UNE, Paraguay

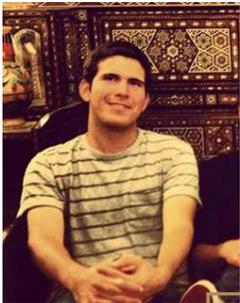
Participants' Reviews - Summer 2012



"This program definitely changed my life. It changed my point of view and now I have found that there are so many different perspectives regarding Israel and the conflict. I became more critical and analytical beyond the conflict. I have become more sensitive about human rights, about human beings, and about the differences between cultural religious thinking. I learned not to judge, and instead listen to the other side of the story. I simply can't go somewhere to visit and then judge, because each country has a completely different history, context, etc. Judgement for me only creates hate and intolerance...How can I judge someone's views if I myself have not lived or experienced it?"

Isaac Yussel Trava Zaga

BA International Business, ITESM CEM, Mexico



"I think that it is a great program that allows us to get a better insight in the conflict and the different dimensions that a solution needs to cover. Even when lacking a strong background in the subject, the content is well structured to allow a better understanding of the conflict."

Alejandro Adan Lara Aguirre

BA Mechanical Engineering, ITESM MTY, Mexico



"I totally liked the course and I am sure I will not forget these four weeks. I wish you guys a lot of success for the following years."

Dennis Pump

BA European Studies, Universiteit Twente, Germany



"Overall I enjoyed the program. I thought it was very comprehensive and satisfying to hear both the religious and political aspect of this conflict in addition to the various coexistence initiatives currently going on."

Zachary Pereira

BA History and Political Science, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada