

Winter 2013

The Center Report



An Intentional
International, Intercultural
Interreligious, Living
Learning Community

The “I” in Privilege and the “Us” in Social Justice

Tawfiq Ammari

“Our own privileges are invisible to us” said the professor in a calm yet distinctively challenging tone. There are times in academia - the best in my view - when you hear a sentence that makes you question so many aspects of your own life; when you feel a distinctive sense of uneasiness. This was definitely one of those moments. Privilege is originally a word from French meaning, verbatim, individual law; law applying to one person. So, how can one's own privileges be invisible to him/her?

Hot but not sultry, with the occasional zephyr now and then; the hilly city is ancient, yet always re-inventing itself, I am back in my hometown, the capital of Jordan. It has been a year since I left Jordan to obtain my Master degree at the University of Michigan School of Information (UMSI). I returned to Jordan to work on my research pertaining to assistive technology and it's use in the visually impaired society here in Jordan in collaboration with Dr. Joyojeet Pal, who is the resident Assistive Technology expert at (UMSI). This has allowed me to encounter different people working in government institutions, NGOs and persons with disabilities who have been able to overcome barriers, and blend into the Jordanian society. One of the most interesting visits I made was to the Friendship Association for the Blind in Jordan. This is one of the NGOs that provides services to the visually impaired, in which they train individuals to use technology, in turn, giving them access to many opportunities that would otherwise, be far from their reach. I also was able to visit Ruwwad, an NGO operating in one of the most penurious neighborhoods in the capital. Ruwwad provides services to the local community (specifically for developmentally delayed children), and engages them in services and activities. Allowing the local community to have more ownership of the NGO, this allowed the NGO's operations to be more sustainable. The bulk of the services are for children, who have little else to do throughout the summer time. Ruwwad provides them with a space to read, art lessons, and other activities.

When I returned to Ann Arbor, Michigan I had the chance, along with two colleagues (Sarah Sherman and Maria Seiferle-Valencia), to start working on a weekly seminar that would investigate the relationship between informatics and social justice. Thankfully, we had a lot of faculty support, which allowed us to create the UMSI Social Justice Seminar. This semester has proven to be a success, we have had 12 speakers, including individuals in academics and other practitioners who spoke about social justice. Especially, in regards to how information professionals can contribute to social justice and social change. We are hoping that, in the future, this seminar will grow into a group that will follow the longstanding University of Michigan record of social service through working with local NGOs and nonprofits.

Though Amman is my hometown, this visit has allowed me to see my city from a different point of view. Maybe, just maybe, some of my privileges are more visible to me.

For Additional Information:

(facebook/ECIR GVS invite date/Upcoming UMIS Social Justice Series program dates)



Above: Tawfiq Ammari, in Jabal Natheef working on his research, summer 2012.

In This Issue

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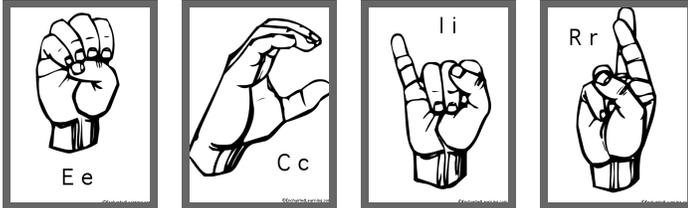
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American Sign Language (ASL) Classes at ECIR

If you're interested in joining, contact Mark Pilarski at (734) 274-5274 or mpilarski@ecir.org for more information!

E-C-I-R signed using American Sign Language



From the Left:
ECIR Residents
Abeer Odeh,
Amanda Souza,
and Ade enjoying
their ASL course
at ECIR, Fall 2012.



Huang, Yunsong

What We Like About ECIR

Before embarking on the trip to Ann Arbor, I was really not sure that we could settle down very easily in a strange city halfway across the world, where everything seems so different and unfamiliar. After three months in this lovely little university city, I've realized that it was the smartest decision I've ever made to apply to the residence program at ECIR. ECIR provides us with not only a cozy apartment to live in, but also a community to feel a sense of belonging to.

When ECIR people are together, including the donators and volunteers, it is evident that they have been making great efforts to make all the residents, especially the foreign ones, able to enjoy the friendly, harmonious and truthful atmosphere. ECIR has such a unique community environment of diversity, we are given plenty of opportunities to understand, respect and learn from people of different origins. Such as the In-

ternational retreat, community service, GVS dinners, Mark's sign language course, journeys outside of Ann Arbor, and even the Halloween trick-or-treat event.

During these gatherings, we come together to share our experiences from both home and abroad, and also find consolations when feeling depressed and lost. In resonance with the rhythm of Ann Arbor, ECIR is featured for mobility of its residents, mostly students and scholars from all over the world, who stay for a various duration of time.

Due to the strenuous study and academic work, it might be true that some residents can hardly know anyone deeply enough to create a lifelong friendship, but it cannot be denied that each and every one of us will be endowed with splendid memories of the international residence. Sometimes, the potluck on occasions before the depar-

ture of close residents can prove how much we care for each other, and how unwilling we are to say goodbye to our co-residents.



ABOVE: Yunsong and his wife Qian (Mary), and their daughter Xinyu (Emily) enjoying the views of Lake Michigan with Debbie Rough on ECIR's weekend trip to Traverse City, Michigan, Fall 2012. Yunsong and his family reside at ECIR.

**SHARE
YOUR
STORY**

“After nourishment, shelter and companionship, stories are the thing we need most in the world.”

- Philip Pullman

ECIR is looking for residents, supporters and volunteers who are interested in writing about their experience. Submissions can be submitted to info@ecir.org. We can't promise that all submissions will be utilized in our publications, however we will archive all submissions, so that future residents and supporters can enjoy your story too!

Luna Liu

How She Made ECIR Her Home Away from Home ...

I've been living in the U.S for two years, and if there is a place I am willing to call "home," it would be ECIR.

I come from China; I studied at the University of Michigan and received my Master of Social Work (MSW) degree in April 2012. I didn't know about ECIR when I first arrived in the U.S, but one day, I attended a community service event that took place at ECIR. A very nice girl greeted me, she looked Asian, and she told me that every Tuesday there would be a free international dinner at ECIR and I was welcome to join. Free dinner? To be honest, I was quite dubious about it because I was new here. Of course, I didn't come to the "free dinner."

"I always wondered who had this brilliant idea to form such an amazing community..."

I quickly forgot about the free dinners at ECIR, because I was very busy with school work. After one year, I needed to start my internship to complete my degree requirements. I was referred to ECIR, and when I first day came to the organization, I had the feeling I came here before... Oh, yes! It was ECIR! And, the girl I met before turns out to be Rosana, the ECIR Residence Life Manager life. I ended up working very closely with Rosana for the next year.

My interesting internship experience started. I worked with another social work student Rebecca. We brainstormed together, organized events together; we had disagreement, misunderstanding during the work but in the end we built cross-cultural friendship! And for me, ECIR is not just a work place. I attended almost all the events (including the "free international dinner"--- now I know it is called "global village cafe"); I made many friends with ECIR residents, learned about different cultures; I practiced piano at ECIR, watched movies and played ping-pong with residents. At night, instead of studying in the library or my room, I always preferred to study at ECIR, because I always felt a sense of security and belong-

ing here, I heard my inner voice: this is my home far away from home.

When I graduated, my parents traveled from China and came to my graduation commencement. It was their first time travelling abroad, and they stayed at ECIR! They had a wonderful time at ECIR playing ping-pong, meeting other Chinese couples and cooking together! We were able to take a short walk from ECIR to Burns Park, and enjoyed a beautiful sunset together. Needless to say, my parents quickly became a big fan of ECIR! After my parents left, I moved into ECIR and became an "official resident!" I had very nice and sweet roomies from different countries, and I believe we created lifelong friendships!

I always wondered who had this brilliant idea to form such an amazing community. I want to say million thanks to Bruce, Rosana, Kay, Mark, interns, board members, volunteers and many other people. Thank you to all those wonderful people who make ECIR a possibility!

Before I left, I took many photos of ECIR, the library, the community kitchen, the office... I had so many beautiful memories here. I want to take them all with me. I saw many tears when people were moving out and going back to their countries. I didn't want to cry, because I know wherever I go, those memories will give me strength, courage, and remind me to pass the love forward. ECIR and the people I met are apart of me already.

I am living in New York City now. The life here is interesting, but I still miss ECIR a lot. If you ever come to New York, contact me, and I will take you to a great Chinese restaurant and tell you more amazing things and interesting stories about ECIR.

Want to Contact Luna?

Email her at yukiyuki@umich.edu



ECIR WISH LIST

Gently Used ...

- Bed sheets, comforters/blankets
- Lamps, love seats, desks and chairs
- Bath towels & wash clothes
- Kitchen pots and pans, kitchen knives, beverage glasses
- Coffee for the Café
- Board games/dvd movies

A Word From the Director

Article Title



Dr. Bruce Martin, Director

*“Lead the Change
you wish to See in
the World...”*

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