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'burg Blogs »

Teaching Arabic at USF St. Petersburg

Posted January 28, 2013 at 4:02 pm by [Raja Benchekroun, Fulbright Alumna](#)

Foreign Language Teaching Assistant known as [FLTA](#), is a Fulbright grant sponsored by the State Department to bring exchange educators from all around the globe to teach their native languages at American universities. Among the languages taught is the Arabic Language.

The University of South Florida St. Petersburg was one of the universities to apply to host a Fulbright Arabic instructor for the year 2011-2012.

A Mutual Cultural Exchange in an Educational Environment

As a Fulbright candidate from [Morocco](#) and one of almost 140 Arabic instructors from the Middle East and North Africa, I had been selected to teach Arabic at the University of South Florida Saint Petersburg. Prior to arriving to my host institution, we attended orientations and workshops in Turkey, and Michigan State University organized by the IIE ([International Institute of Education](#)) and then a midyear conference in Washington DC, in order to reinforce the objectives of exchange programs, and the role of each one of us to teach our native language, develop our foreign language teaching skills, be cultural ambassadors of our countries and bring our students closer to new customs.

I arrived to USF St. Petersburg to teach the first [Arabic](#) class at the [College of Arts and Sciences](#), Department of [World Languages](#) for the year 2011/2012. With warm welcomes and support from faculty and staff, I enthusiastically started my first class with students from different majors. As a speaker of a foreign language, I felt a sheer responsibility towards my students to bring the joy of speaking a new language and exploring the spells of a new culture. The Arabic Class students shared the same passion and curiosity. We wanted to bring a new feeling to class, we sat in a shape of half a circle, facing each other and remembering every one's name. We started calling it our Arabic Class Family. Students did not individually respond to assignments, they have performed a number of collective works that made them bond together and stay friends even after classes have ended.

The class was a channel of mutual cultural understanding of similar values between the United States and the rest of the Arab world. We built a strong will to boost our understanding of a new culture and accepting differences without losing who we truly are. The language taught in class is MSA, [Modern Standard Arabic](#) that is spoken by 422 million people, which unites 23 states from North Africa to the Middle East. Now has been given a national day to celebrate as [World Arabic Language Day](#) on December 18 by the [UNESCO](#).

To teach a new language to students with no previous knowledge of the language is tremendously delightful. But bringing your students closer to new customs and people is a precious feeling of satisfaction for a foreign language educator. Students are not only able to

receive knowledge that will make them linguistically literate but also what's needed to be culturally educated. I have spent a great school year full of a number of cultural, social and linguistic experiences, and built some valuable relationships on a personal and professional level.

My Fulbright exchange program has ended, but my role as a cultural ambassador and a language educator hasn't. Now I am back to maintain the Arabic Program as a graduate in [USFSP MLA program](#). The College of Arts and Sciences, Department of [Society, Culture & Languages](#) (formerly World Languages) faculty and staff have welcomed me back with great support and advocacy for the Arabic program. USF St. Petersburg now offers [Arabic I, II, III](#). The Arabic Students have formed an Arabic Club to unite their passions and explore the culture more closely in a number of events and activities. To connect with the Arabic program students, you can join our open Facebook group [USFSP Arabic Club](#). There is also a page that I have created to share material with whoever is interested in learning Arabic [Arabic For Speakers of Other Languages](#).



Raja, FLTA. Picture taken at the Washington DC midyear conference 2011.



USFSP Arabic Instructor



Final class group picture of the first Arabic students in USFSP, Fall 2011.



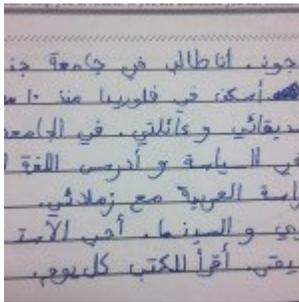
Arabic sentences written by an Arabic I student.



Class Activity. Reordering scrambled sentences



Classroom setting



A paragraph written by an Arabic II student



A field trip to the Arabic Festival in Orlando



Arabic Bulletin Board



Classroom setting



Forming sentences



A work by an Arabic I student.

About the blogger



Hi ! or Salamu Alaykum in Arabic. I'm a Fulbright Alumna, passionate about foreign languages and cultures. I am currently joining USFSP as a graduate international student in the the MLA program. Enjoying my journey of Teaching Arabic as a foreign language.