

Visiting Fulbright Scholar gains national recognition for SIUE experience

by Megan Weiser

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EDWARDSVILLE - As a host institution of the Fulbright program, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville welcomed Visiting Fulbright Scholar Wajdi Balloumi, of Tunisia, to serve as a teaching assistant in the College of Arts and Sciences' Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, and attend courses beginning in August 2018.

The Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant Program aims to increase Americans' knowledge of other cultures and languages by supporting teaching assistantships in over 30 languages at hundreds of colleges and universities.

Prior to arriving at SIUE, Balloumi worked as an English teacher and assisted non-governmental organizations focused on entrepreneurship, women empowerment, countering violent extremism and fighting corruption in Tunisia.

Aside from teaching undergraduate Arabic courses, Balloumi has fully embraced SIUE's campus life, having recently attended Arts & Issues events like Fred Gray's Montgomery Bus Boycott presentation. He was also invited to speak on Tunisia and the influence of French colonization for another professor.

Balloumi has also become extremely active in a number of student organizations, including the Global Ambassador Program, Public Relations Student Society of America, which he was elected the organization's treasurer, Service Saturdays, as well as the International Hospitality Program.

"I find the International Hospitality Program particularly unique because it helps to integrate international students into the community by fostering relationships between students and American families, which I consider very welcoming," Balloumi said. "As a Fulbright scholar, I'm expected not only to teach and take courses, but also to serve as a cultural ambassador of my country.

"By engaging with the community and sharing my experiences, I can begin to change stereotypes and help promote mutual understanding and positive cultural exchange."

"Mr. Balloumi brings a broad range of interests and experience as he was involved in training local communities in Tunisia," said SIUE's Carolina Rocha, PhD, professor of Spanish and Latin American studies. "The many activities in which he was involved during his first semester, followed by his subsequent selection in the Fulbright conference, demonstrate that he could successfully transfer his leadership skills from Tunisia to the United States. He is an inspiration for the SIUE community."

Due to his extensive campus involvement, Balloumi was chosen as a model scholar at the Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant Mid-Year Conference in December 2018 in Washington, D.C. He and other Fulbright scholars met with Assistant Secretary

of State for Education and Cultural Affairs Marie Royce. During her conference address, she particularly applauded Balloumi for his “amazing time management skills” to be able to balance teaching and his on-campus activities.

“When I was showcased as a Model Fulbrighter in Washington, D.C., I felt very honored and proud not only to represent my country, but also SIUE.” he said. “The recognition contributes to my personal development and helps promote SIUE as a diverse and inclusive space that allows everyone the opportunity to achieve their goals.”

Balloumi will conclude his visit at SIUE in May 2019.

Central to SIUE’s exceptional and comprehensive education, the College of Arts and Sciences offers degree programs in the natural sciences, humanities, arts, social sciences, and communications. The College touches the lives of all SIUE students helping them explore diverse ideas and experiences, while learning to think and live as fulfilled, productive members of the global community. Study abroad, service-learning, internships, and other experiential learning opportunities better prepare SIUE students not only to succeed in our region's workplaces, but also to become valuable leaders who make important contributions to our communities.

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Photo: SIUE Visiting Fulbright Scholar Wajdi Balloumi, of Tunisia, works with an SIUE student.

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