

UNIVERSITY of
NORTHERN COLORADO



*College of Humanities and Social Sciences
Sociology*

**Report on Egypt Travel Course
ARAMFO Foundation**

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This course was offered during the first six week summer session in 2012. Following is a description of various elements of the course. I went to Egypt with the students and therefore am able to report on that portion of the trip from first- hand knowledge. In addition, I attended all the Saturday class sessions which were held in Candelaria and I had access to the Black Board part of the course.

Academic Integrity

One portion of the course consisted of four all day Saturday meetings which were held in February at the beginning of the course and in May after readings and online discussions had been completed. Books and other readings on modern Egypt were assigned and discussions were conducted on Black Board. In addition, students were directed to select from a group of topics and prepare to discuss these topics when they were in Egypt. They will also prepare written course papers on these topics. These are due after returning from Egypt. The academic part of the course appears to be comparable to courses which are taught by the Sociology faculty online and on campus. The instructor of the course was Dr. Abeer Ibrahim with a Ph.D. in Social Work from Cairo University. Dr. Ibrahim grew up in Egypt and has extensive experience and contacts in that country. She is a member of the Sociology part time faculty through the HSS hiring pool and it is recommended that she continue as instructor of the course.

Visits to Universities and other Academic Activity in Egypt

Three different universities in Egypt were visited by the students, Cairo University, Helwan University, south of Cairo and Misr University in a Cairo suburb called 6th of October. Cairo and Helwan are public universities and Misr is private. Education in Egypt is free from 1st grade through Ph.D. level study. Thus, the public universities are normally quite large (Cairo University, 250,000 students) and they use the model of lecture and major examinations only. The private university which is about 10 years old is similar in size to UNC and has programs of study somewhat similar to those in the U.S. Our students met with those from the department of archaeology and tourism. The meeting and discussions among students were very successful and stimulating. In fact, a picture taken during the discussion is currently on the Misr University website.

At Cairo University students heard from faculty members in the department of economics and political science. They answered questions and were very knowledgeable regarding the current governmental changes and the upcoming election in Egypt. While we were there, this was a major topic of interest to all. The group at Helwan consisted of Egyptian students, faculty members and administrators and the UNC students presented their topics of interest (which they had researched) for discussion. The format was a large oval table with microphones around which everyone sat and the discussion was lively.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell, Cultural Affairs Officer at the American Embassy in Egypt was notified of the group's arrival and planned visits to the universities. In addition, there was a dinner in Cairo attended by all the students as well as Mitchell; Professor Maged Negm, Vice-President of Helwan University, Professor Mokhtar M. Bakr, University chancellor for International Agreements, International Projects and Training, Helwan University; Dr. Omaira El Shal, Head of Tourism Guidance Department Misr University; Professor Anthony Perzigian, Board of Trustees Chair, Future University in Egypt; Professor Galal Elgemeie, Ministry of Higher Education in Egypt and other Egyptian university representatives.

Contacts with university personnel and students were ample, well organized and contributed greatly to learning about Egyptian culture and to the cultural exchange purpose of the travel course.

Students also heard from non-governmental organization personnel and had an opportunity to buy crafts made by Egyptian women in an NGO project.

After the university visits, the group visited various historical attractions in and around Cairo, Alexandria and Luxor. In each city we had a local guide who was well trained in Egyptology and in guiding. All the guides had received Ph.D.s in various aspects of Egyptology. They spoke very good, understandable English and were exceptionally knowledgeable in describing the meaning of all the ruins and re-constructed or intact sites that we visited. They were able to answer all questions in detail. In summary, the guides were impressive.

Travel Arrangements and Security

Transportation to Egypt was via British Airways with a 4-5 hour stopover at London's Heathrow Airport. The airport is very well marked; even so, the leader, Dr. Abeer Ibrahim kept track of all students to ensure that they made the transfer. In Egypt transportation was via a 2009 model bus with excellent air conditioning and public address system. There was general satisfaction with the bus. Security dictated that transportation be by private bus or plane although there is a train from the south of Egypt to the north.

One aspect of security consisted of an armed guard on the bus at all times. In addition, a police tail was requested by Dr. Ibrahim; an unmarked police vehicle trailed the bus everywhere in Egypt with changes in police departments in different "provinces". Additionally, the hotels/resorts chosen for lodging had their own security. The hotels were rated 5 star by the Egyptian rating agency. During the university visits extra security

men and police were present in order to avert any problems. The students were generally not aware of the amount of security provided since they were very unobtrusive.

This type of lodging is obviously not typical of where students would stay while attending university. Egypt is a developing country and standards of lodging differ very substantially from those in the U.S. For a short travel course as we experienced it is not feasible to provide the security needed in student dormitories. Students were able to experience plentiful aspects of Egyptian culture in the time we were there. Egyptian food was provided; there were student meetings as detailed above and generally when students were out they could talk with Egyptians who were selling items or working as guides etc.

Egypt is currently regarded as more dangerous to visit than is actually the case. When there are demonstrators in Tahrir Square in Cairo, it looks and sounds through the American media as though the whole country is in an uprising. It is also true that there is currently a civil war in Syria and the unrest in Libya recently led to armed uprising and civil war. Each country is very different although they share language and many customs. Dr. Abeer Ibrahim is in a good position to know whether it is truly dangerous to travel to Egypt and in 2011 she made a conservative choice to cancel the planned trip because of the initial uprising and Mubarak's ouster. I think ARAMFO's judgment can be trusted in regard to this trip.

The unexpected can always happen. Should there be a generally dangerous situation, the U.S. embassy has a plan to fly American citizens out of the country and as stated above, the U.S. embassy is notified that UNC students will be in the country. This year, we experienced a bus breakdown on the way from Luxor, in the south, to the Cairo airport, further north. We had to get there in time for the plane and we also had about 4 hours of slack time built into the schedule. Dr. Ibrahim called the company for a replacement bus and one was sent; after several hours delay we were on our way. While stalled, the local police sent out reinforcements so any potential dangerous situation could have been prevented. The officers were pleasant and some played a card game with students since no danger occurred.

ARAMFO

The travel course arrangements were made by ARAMFO. Through ARAMFO, the trip was relatively inexpensive; it cost the students \$3,300.00 which was all inclusive (all travel to and from and within Egypt, three meals per day, all lodging and all admissions to various museums and historical sites). Some estimates for such a trip arranged by a travel course company are as high as \$7000.00. The relatively modest price of this trip is a big advantage to U.N.C. students since most of them are completing college through scholarships and loans. Many do not have financial resources which would allow a more expensive trip; they would be more likely to be able to afford this trip. Everything on this trip was as stated by ARAMFO. It is a high quality trip at a very modest price.

Summary

This Egypt travel course is academically sound, inexpensive and outstanding as a travel course. The Sociology Department and UNC would be passing up an excellent

opportunity for students to see where western history began as well as a contemporary Arab society and culture if they did not take advantage of this trip arranged by ARAMFO. I recommend that the Sociology Department continue its involvement in the Egypt travel course. We would also welcome any other department that might want to be involved.