

Life before Guilford: Diya Abdo

By Victor Lopez
STAFF WRITER

"I always knew I wanted to be a professor," said Diya Abdo, assistant professor of English. At age 13, Abdo accompanied a cousin to her English lectures at the University of Jordan. The experience of being in a college classroom was a formative experience for the young Abdo.

Abdo, a first-generation Palestinian born and raised in Jordan, found herself "underwhelmed" by the teaching style of the professor who she heard lecturing and saw where teaching could be done differently.

"Listening to those lectures with my cousin was the single experience that determined what kind of teacher I wanted to be," said Abdo. "I was also really passionate about literature by that point anyway, and so combining my enthusiasm for literature and my newfound appreciation for teaching done well was not a hard step."

A few years later Abdo began her undergraduate career in Jordan at age 15. Abdo attended Yarmouk University, a public university close to the Syrian border.

At 19, Abdo was accepted to New Jersey's Drew University graduate program in English literature. However, the move to the United States was challenging and traumatic in many ways.

"I had never been to an English-speaking country by that point or indeed been on a plane in more than a decade," said Abdo. "I had never been separated from my family to such an extent and the new cultural experience was alienating and

"(My grandmother) was illiterate but also the smartest person I ever knew. Her forbearance, her intelligence, her resilience in the face of unimaginable adversity are a constant source of awe."

Diya Abdo, assistant professor of English



(Left) **Diya Abdo**, assistant professor of English, reclines in her office on campus. (Right) A younger Abdo poses with beloved student **Tahani Hawari** at Ahliyya Amman University, Jordan, where she taught from 2003-06.



overwhelming."

Despite these challenges, Abdo completed M.A. and Ph.D. programs while working full time, first as a secretary at the financial aid office, and eventually teaching two courses

a semester at Drew and then at Ramapo college.

After the events of Sept. 11, 2001, Abdo felt motivated to speak on behalf of Arabs and Muslims. Abdo found her interests shifting

focus to Arab and Muslim women, and in 2003, Abdo moved back to Jordan with her American husband. During that time, she taught at two separate institutions: Al-Ahliyya Amman University and the Arab Open University.

Abdo soon found herself in trouble for an article she published while in her last position.

"The administration felt that my scholarship was problematic in that it, according to them, conflicted with the institution's Islamic values," said Abdo.

Abdo realized it would be difficult to publish the kind of work and research that she longed to do if she stayed in Jordan. That realization put her on the path that eventually led her to Guilford. However, Abdo's love for her home has never been lost in transition.

"I love being an Arab, and so my fondest memories all center around things that make up my identity: family functions, my very close relationship with my siblings, my Arabic language, certain Jordanian and Palestinian meals and music that I love," said Abdo.

Abdo said that her greatest inspiration is her grandmother.

"She was illiterate but also the smartest person I ever knew," said Abdo. "Her forbearance, her intelligence, her resilience in the face of unimaginable adversity are a constant source of awe."

Abdo's grandmother passed away two years ago, a day after Abdo found out she was pregnant with her daughter, who is named in honor of her great-grandmother.

Food Not Bombs presentation educates community

By Omar Hamad
STAFF WRITER

Against the backdrop of a colorful poster depicting people in an upbeat landscape of clouds and free food, the noise of some 50 people crammed into the Greenleaf Coffee Co-Op gradually came to a hush. Attention quickly shifted to the night's keynote speakers, spokespersons from an international network of collectives called Food Not Bombs.

International spokesperson and founding member of FNB Keith McHenry, took the stage to delve deeper into the story of this amalgamation of collectives.

"It all started when I was a student at Boston University 30 years ago and Howard Zinn was one of my professors," said McHenry. "He had the habit of encouraging all of his students to go to these protests for a nuclear power plant that was being built and eventually people started getting arrested."

Attempting to raise funds for the imprisoned protesters, McHenry and his friends started making baked goods in order to meet bail and release them. What started out as an activity to help friends in need ultimately raised a larger question: what if the money spent

on America's defense budget was spent on providing basic necessities such as food and shelter?

"We started to collect all of the food being thrown out from our workplaces, and got hooked up with a tofu factory," said McHenry. "Then we started handing out the food at a number of different places in Boston."

The impromptu efforts of these students to deal with the issue of homelessness and hunger provoked massive arrests, which actually served to bring more attention to FNB and inspire similar chapters.

FNB rejects organizational labels. While the network does not espouse any specific political ideology, a majority of its founding members were anarchists. Each chapter of FNB acts autonomously and makes consensus-based decisions.

Today, chapters of FNB are found in up to a thousand locations around the world, and in such disparate locales as Japan, Nigeria, and even in Greensboro.

FNB coordinators Jordan Green and Saralee Galien recounted more about the background and mission of FNB in Greensboro.

"Food Not Bombs helps homeless and marginalized people get

basic, nutritious food, acting on the belief that healthy food is a privilege and not a right," said Green.

Green said that FNB in Greensboro began 15 years ago in and around collective houses on Tate Street. Since the closing of the Hive, the Greensboro branch of FNB has operated out of the Tanenbaum-Sternberger room at The University North Carolina at Greensboro, where they typically serve 100 people in any given week.

The efforts of FNB to combat hunger and injustice often involve vocal protest. These actions have led to the targeting of FNB chapters both in and outside of the United States.

"We have had FBI informants try to infiltrate our chapters here in the U.S., and faced kidnappings and assassinations of Food Not Bombs volunteers in Kenya," said McHenry.

While some have called FNB "unpatriotic," McHenry has a different view.

"We are unpatriotic in the sense that we are willing to denounce what we view as unjust acts by our country," said McHenry.

"Although he used the term unpatriotic to describe the actions of Food Not Bombs, I would not necessarily describe it as such,"



International spokesperson and founding member of Food Not Bombs **Keith McHenry** joined other advocates in the Greenleaf Coffee Co-Op on Feb. 1 to speak about the history and current efforts of the FNB movement.

said first-year Billy Millman. "In fact, I feel that attempting to change the world in the way Food Not Bombs does could actually be considered patriotic."

McHenry provoked a great deal of discussion amongst the students present about how to approach issues of homelessness and poverty.

"I was ready for action when

leaving the Greenleaf ... the speaker (McHenry) became more inspiring with every word and made me want to contribute more (to the cause of FNB)," said first-year Sara Besmertnik.

"Ultimately the point that Food Not Bombs tries to make is that societies can be changed to provide support for human needs," said McHenry.