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THE PLUS PROGRAM: *Building Relationships Through Education*

"PLUS students are building understanding just by being here and interacting with Americans. While they are learning, Americans are learning as well about worlds beyond our borders. In the process, we are building relationships of goodwill for a lifetime."

– Assistant Secretary of State Patricia Harrison

The Partnerships for Learning Undergraduate Studies (PLUS) Program, part of the Partnerships for Learning Initiative (P4L), is the first-ever U.S. Government-sponsored undergraduate scholarship program for outstanding students from the Middle East and North Africa. The PLUS Program provides an opportunity for undergraduate students who are less privileged or live outside of major metropolitan areas to study in the United States for two and a half years. The program was developed by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and is administered by the Academy for Educational Development (AED) and America-Mideast Educational and Training Services, Inc. (AMIDEAST).

In 2004, 71 students from across North Africa and the Middle East received scholarships to complete the final two years of their university studies in the United States. They represent: Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, West Bank & Gaza, and Yemen. Students will receive their bachelor's degrees from U.S. institutions in the spring of 2006.

The PLUS Program will be expanded in 2005 to include more students, including students from countries in South Asia.

PLUS AND PARTNERSHIPS FOR LEARNING

The PLUS Program is one of the newest programs of Partnerships for Learning, an initiative introduced by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs to reach out to younger, more diverse audiences. P4L engages youth in dialogue through expanded academic, professional, youth, and cultural exchange programs. The PLUS Program supports the goals of the P4L initiative by:

- Providing educational opportunities for youth who have not had access to such opportunities;
- Working to close the "hope gap" among youth in the Muslim world;
- Creating a positive agenda for cooperation with the Muslim world; and
- Strengthening the capacity of future leaders to drive economic and societal development.

Selection

Students are nominated by embassies through locally administered competitions or through Fulbright Commissions. The PLUS students are then selected by an impartial panel of experts based on their academic achievement, leadership potential, diversity of experience, and commitment to their home region.

The Program

Students kick off their two-year experience with six months of intensive English-language training and pre-academic preparation. This includes home-stay opportunities and cultural enrichment activities that introduce the stu-

dents to American culture, society, and values. PLUS students then enroll in universities across the United States to complete their Bachelor's degrees. Students spend their final two years of study concentrating in the fields of liberal arts, social sciences, and humanities. Students partici-

participate in extracurricular activities on campus and in the local community, on clubs and teams ranging from debate to football to international affairs. ■



Maysa Gayyusi, PLUS Morocco, meets Montana State's Provost David Dooley and President Geoffrey Gamble.

For more information about the PLUS Program or the more than 30,000 individuals who participate in Department of State Educational and Cultural Affairs programs annually, please visit <http://exchanges.state.gov/>