

Miami to host Mideast students

Program hopes to build mutual understanding between cultures.

By Michael D. Pitman
Staff Writer

HAMILTON — Miami University plans to help teach 20 Middle Eastern students this summer a different way to make change happen in their home countries.

The Center for Civic Engagement at Miami University Hamilton renewed its nearly \$240,000 U.S. Department of State grant for the Study of the United States Institute on Civic Engagement. This year the school will host students from Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and the Palestinian Territories for nearly the entire month of July.

One of the primary goals for the program is to build mutual understanding between the countries and the United States, said Sarah Woiteshek Pietzuch, director for the Center of Civic Engagement at Miami University Hamilton.

"The primary hope for our students participating in this is they (learn) a different way, and with knowledge and education to organize (their) citizens other than protests and revolution," Pietzuch said.

She said it's important these students also know that grassroots-level change won't happen overnight but will give them "a different way to work toward an issue." The curriculum will focus on a variety of civic skills, such as being able to create a dialogue and how to bring stakeholders together with consensus-building.

"It will help them debunk the myth that you have to be in an elected leadership position in order to move forward. That's not the case at all. We focus on the civil rights movement as a very powerful citizen-run movement here in the United States."

One of the primary teaching tools for the civil rights movement is Freedom Summer, which Oxford played a role

in training volunteers to head to Mississippi to register blacks to vote.

Last year, in the school's first year for the State Department grant, 20 African students came to Miami University and Hamilton. Pietzuch said the school has the opportunity to renew the grant for a third year before it would have to reapply.

Ten Miami students, known as regional fellows, will "live and learn and socialize" with the foreign students for the entire five-week program, Pietzuch said.

"It creates this educational, international exchange for our students here," she said. "And for our students on the regional campuses, that's really important for us since many of our students are unable to travel and study abroad. We're bringing that global experience to them in the

classroom."

The students will be spending time on the Miami University campuses in Oxford and Hamilton, as well as in the city itself. They will attend the Fourth of July festivities in the city.

Later in the month, the students will tour the Butler County Board of Elections to learn about this country's electoral process. Last year's tour with the African students was very well-received, said Butler County's elections Director Lynn Kinkaid.

"I think it's important that they know how the process is and how we do things over here," said Kinkaid. "It's not like that in every country. Democracy, I just think it's important that foreign visitors, and even students in our own country, are more aware of how the process works."

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