



- Spring Break Means More Than a Trip to the Beach
- Students Touch History in Wesleyan's Archives
- Bruce Masters Discusses Lebanon's Civil War
- Coming Home Is Not Always Easy After Study Abroad

Bennet Enters Final Year As President

Under a warm spring sky on May 4, President Douglas Bennet '59 informed a crowd of several hundred faculty, staff, and students that the upcoming academic year will be his last in his South College office.

Bennet spoke on the steps of North College, along with Midge Bennet and Jim Dresser '63, chair of the Board of Trustees. The crowd responded to the president with sustained applause, and the event concluded with the "Alma Mater" and "Fight Song" played on the South College carillon.

When he relinquishes his duties in 2007, he will have served 12 years as president. In the meantime, he said he would continue his presidency at a vigorous pace. He and Midge Bennet plan to meet with alumni groups across the country in the coming year to offer thanks for support that has made possible many of the accomplishments of his presidency.

"We want the next year to be productive in every way," Bennet said. "We intend to continue our usual pace through the year. Midge and I look forward to Wesleyan's 175th anniversary as an opportunity to celebrate our university's proud tradition of education in the arts and sciences.

"You could say there has been a Bennet family love affair with Wesleyan since

1929, when my father enrolled as a freshman," he added. "I promise you that our love will burn brightly for as long as Midge and I are privileged to be part of this wonderful community. I have great confidence in the future of Wesleyan. We look forward to being a part of it for many years to come."

Dresser said he was planning to discuss the process for selecting a successor with the Board at its Commencement weekend meeting. He promised to keep the Wesleyan community fully informed about the process and to ensure that students, faculty,

the new Film Studies Center at the opposite edge. Bennet's accomplishments, however, have gone well beyond bricks and mortar.

"The hallmark of Doug's tenure has been his ability to forge a strategic direction for the institution," said Dresser.


Bennet led two successful strategic planning initiatives. The first, "Strategy for Wesleyan" (1998), included a vision for a liberal arts education tuned to an era of rapid change. It sought to define the essential capabilities of an educated person and established the principles

need-blind admission and thus to building the university's student aid program; an expansion of the faculty in order to improve teaching ratios and expand scholarship and teaching in new, interdisciplinary areas; and the beginning of a program of campus renewal.

The second strategy, "Engaged with the World" (2005), describes priorities for the period 2005-2010, including continuing curricular innovations and renewed commitments to international studies and to science. It outlines priorities for academics, campus life, student aid, and physical infrastructure.

Bennet's emphasis on planning and on strict allocation of budget resources according to the priorities thus established has enabled Wesleyan to devote the highest proportion of its total spending to teaching and research and the lowest to administration among the top 50 schools in the annual rankings produced by *U.S. News and World Report*.

The Bennet presidency has seen a 25 percent growth in applications to Wesleyan, with an eight-point increase in selectivity. The endowment nearly doubled during his tenure, to \$631 million. Wesleyan invigorated its relationship with Middletown, establishing the Green Street Arts Center, and helping the city to acquire the 100-bed Inn at Middletown on Main Street.

The Bennets plan to remain in Connecticut at their family residence along the Connecticut River. 

President and Mrs. Bennet respond to warm applause.

BENNET SPOKE WITH ONE OF THE MOST TANGIBLE SIGNS OF PROGRESS DURING HIS PRESIDENCY CLOSE AT HAND: THE SUZANNE LEMBERG USDAN UNIVERSITY CENTER NOW UNDER CONSTRUCTION.

and staff are meaningfully involved.

As Bennet spoke, one of the most tangible signs of progress during his presidency was close at hand: the Suzanne Lemberg Usdan University Center now under construction. Other construction projects undertaken during the Bennet years have changed the campus, ranging from a major addition to the Freeman Athletic Center at one edge of campus to

on which to make ongoing curricular choices. It affirmed the value of scholarship and teaching in a residential community and confirmed that knowing how to learn is the most durable legacy of a Wesleyan education.

"Strategy for Wesleyan" also defined key institutional priorities which became the foundation for the \$281 million Wesleyan Campaign: an enduring commitment to



PRIMARY SOURCES JOURNEYS INTO THE PAST

Suzu Taraba '77, a COL major, remembers making her way only once as an undergraduate into the Special Collections of Olin Library. Now, as University Archivist, Taraba tries to ensure that students don't miss this opportunity for scholarship.

She began this mission in 1997, in her first year as Wesleyan's archivist, by perusing course syllabi and giving faculty members suggestions about how Special Collections holdings might augment a specific course. She has continued this project as new professors joined the faculty and additional courses updated the offerings.

When Magda Teter, assistant professor of history, arrived on campus in 2000, she accepted Taraba's offer, and her class in early modern European history is now among the 35-50 class sessions and other presentations that Taraba offers each academic year. Teter notes that this period includes the development of the printing press, and she is eager for her students to see the Medieval manuscripts on parchment as well as the early printed works that are housed in Special Collections.

"I talk a lot about the impact of the printing press on European culture," Teter notes. "As part of our work in the archives, I ask them to first look at a book as an object—which they are not used to doing; they are used to seeing a book as a text—and then I ask them to think about this artifact in the context of society at the time."

For Andrew Perechocky '08, a member of Teter's class last year, this work marked an academic turning point. Interested in old maps, he based a paper on his observation that a French cartographer had mysteriously taken pains to map the Ohio Valley when no one was living in that region. Perechocky learned that the Ohio Valley was under dispute, claimed by both England and France. The French cartographer, in an effort to

make it appear a French holding, lavished care on this area.

He also appreciated his work as a tactile experience. “I had thought I’d have to go through a security procedure, or wear gloves. Instead, they’d bring a book over to me, lay it on a foam pad, and then I was free to work with it. I could touch it and turn the pages and study it myself.”

The thrill of independent scholarship took hold of Jessie Smith ’06 when her theater history class with Professor of Theater Gay Smith assembled in the Davison Rare Book Room to meet with Taraba, who brought out Wesleyan’s four Shakespeare folios.

During her talk, Taraba highlighted her favorite. Filled with marginalia—markings, jottings, and notations—this folio seemed

to be a promptbook, a director’s copy that included blocking instructions and other directions unique to that production.

Although new to research, Smith quickly discovered that the initial premise was false. The folio was not a promptbook but an author’s preparation copy, marked up to adapt Shakespeare’s plays into someone else’s amalgamized creation.

Ultimately, she was able to attribute the markings to 18th-century playwright Charles Johnson, who in 1723 wrote *Love in a Forest*, an adaptation of *Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *As You Like It*.

“I did a transcription of the entire folio and I recorded it, line by line, on the computer, to see what did and didn’t match up,” she says. In the marginalia of the

Pyramus and Thisbe scene of *Midsummer Night’s Dream* she found her key. Johnson’s notes matched verbatim lines from *Love in a Forest*. “These notes were his preparation to publish that play.”

As is the standard practice, the thesis will be bound and saved in Special Collections. Smith said it was possible that parts of it would be published in a scholarly journal.

Taraba is pleased. “It is so difficult to come up with original scholarship on Shakespeare,” she notes. “There are so few new sources.”

Another student frequenting Special Collections is Evan Simko-Bednarski ’07, a philosophy and government double major. He researches historical records for his campus activity, the WESU radio station,

and he catalogs the station material, much of which he has rounded up and hauled over to Olin.

“I started finding things,” he said. “The radio station had been completely unaware that in 1990 their incorporation had gone under. We knew that something had happened in that era, but with complete student turnover every four years, we just lost that piece of our history.”

This, notes Taraba, is an often-overlooked role that Special Collections can play in student life. “Students have a four-year memory,” she says. “If students learn the history of their organization, they can often save themselves the effort of recreating a solution to a problem that had been solved once before.”



Evan Simko-Bednarski ’07 and Wesleyan Archivist Suzy Taraba ’77 examine minutes of the university’s Board of Trustees recorded between 1959 and 1970.

JOHN WESLEY



**VOLUNTEERING
FORGET ABOUT CANCUN**

Jane Maxson ’06 spent her spring break on the Gulf Coast, but not sporting a sun hat and flip-flops on the beach. Equipped with a hammer, nails, and tool belt, she volunteered for hurricane relief efforts—one of about 100 Wesleyan students and faculty volunteering worldwide during break.

Maxson and 50 other students, many of whom are Wesleyan Christian Fellowship members, teamed with “Willing Hearts, Helping Hands,” a Christian ministry aiming to rebuild 200 houses in hurricane-affected areas. They aided victims on the Mississippi coast.

Another 50-plus students went directly to the hurricane’s path of wrath in New Orleans. Working in the hardest-hit Upper Ninth Ward, they stayed in and around a Catholic school that had been converted into a base of operations for Common Ground Relief. Some students slept in classrooms, while others slept in tents outside.

Brian Thorpe ’07 spent nine days armed with crowbars, shovels, and wheelbarrows,

doing what he could to help clean up and rebuild. Coming face-to-face with the destruction made him realize that he had been desensitized by images on television.

“The raw truth is that seven months after the hurricane there is still precious little being done by the state, local, and especially federal government to rebuild the city and help the poorer citizens of the area to get back on their feet,” he says. “While I came back from New Orleans frustrated and disheartened, I still felt filled with hope by seeing so many people my own age giving up their time and money to go down and help.”

Some students volunteered for Habitat for Humanity in South Carolina, while others worked abroad in Mexico and in Nicaragua.

Jessica French Smith ’09, Kevin Young ’07, and Octavio Flores, adjunct associate professor of Romance Languages and Literatures, went to Nagarote, Nicaragua, as part of the Wesleyan in Nicaragua (WIN) organization. The Wesleyan organization is partnered with The Norwalk-Nagarote Sister City Project and together, the groups



Spring break volunteer opportunities in New Orleans and elsewhere gave students much to do and even more to contemplate.

planned to participate in community service activities in Nagarote.

“Knowing that there are people all over the world living in horribly unjust conditions keeps me working hard to take advantage of the resources available to me and to use these resources to help

others as much as possible,” Smith says. “Besides, it’s a much more satisfying alternative to Cancun. I don’t think anyone cries when they leave Cancun because they are going to miss their host family or because they couldn’t stay longer and work harder.”

PICK OF THE SYLLABUS

Civil War in Lebanon

Bruce Masters, professor of history, selects *Beirut Blues* by Hanan al-Shaykh, translated by Catherine Cobham



I rarely have the opportunity to incorporate fictional works into my syllabi in teaching courses on Middle Eastern history. For much of the pre-modern period, fiction in Muslim cultures was confined to poetry. However beautiful the imagery invoked by

Muslim poets in Islam's classical age, poetry remains a notoriously fickle medium through which to teach history. But in teaching a course entitled "The Arab World in the Twentieth Century," I have found that novels and feature films from the region help to provide Wesleyan students with cultural insights that might otherwise be absent from the classroom. One such novel is *Beirut Blues*, the bittersweet account of Lebanon's turbulent civil war, written by Hanan al-Shaykh. Al-Shaykh is a secular, Shia Muslim woman whose novel provides a voice to two segments of the Arab population, women and the Shia, which until very recently have been overlooked by most people in the West.

For me, personally, the novel evokes a time and place that I came perilously close to experiencing firsthand. In the early '70s, I was living in Cairo. But like most Westerners residing in the "Mother of the World," as Cairenes call their home, I would "escape" to Beirut whenever possible. For a young American seeking to imbibe Middle Eastern culture, that city seemed too good to be true. It was at once a vibrant center of Arab culture and a place where you could find all the creature comforts of home. In what turned out to be the city's halcyon years, I could imagine no better future than a lifetime spent in Beirut. I was actively seeking gainful employment there, but on my last visit in the spring of 1975, the barricades started to go up. Although my Lebanese friends assured me it was only a "passing phase," I decided to return to the United States and graduate studies, a choice that ultimately led me to Wesleyan.

It is in those turbulent weeks of the spring and early summer of 1975, when the fighting started and individual residents of the "Paris of the Levant" had to decide whether to stay or flee, that *Beirut Blues* begins. The novel is narrated in the first person and it is presumably largely autobiographical. It unfolds as a series of

letters the author writes to friends and former lovers now safely in Europe, and the Arabic title of the novel *Barid Bayrut* simply means *Mail from Beirut*. But as the novel progresses, the intended recipients of the author's letters become more fanciful, including one to the war itself and to the jazz singer, Billie Holiday, whose music provides a *leitmotiv* that runs through the novel. Although there is a plot line embedded in the letters, the choice of framing the novel in that genre allows the author to provide the reader with free-flowing meditations on war and survival that would otherwise be out of place in a strictly narrative novel.

Certain that the fighting is only a temporary glitch in her normal ebb and flow of life, the author decides to stay in her family's house in the Shia neighborhood of Dahiyeh. Gradually, however, her Beirut shrinks with the erection of the barricades separating Christian East Beirut from the Muslim West and further still as each religious community closes in on itself for protection. Multiple militias spring up to enforce religious identity in the name



of communal conformity and solidarity. The author finds the blossoming of headscarves on the heads of friends who formerly wore the most current of Western fashion and the omnipresent posters of the Ayatollah Khomeini stifling. She flees to her grandparents' ancestral village in the Shia south only to find that the PLO forces have turned a once rural Eden into a battlefield with the Israelis. The villagers curse both sides equally but are powerless to influence the outcome. The author does not slide into the easy explanation of the civil war offered by so many Lebanese, however, that Lebanon simply exploded due to the intrigues of outsiders. Rather her scathing description of the Lebanese militias cultivating opium poppies on fields confiscated from the peasants of her village demonstrates that all sides are equally culpable in her opinion. After a harrowing return to Beirut in the company of a former lover who is also an official in the PLO, the author finally decides to leave her beloved city with him for Paris. But as the flight is called and he boards the plane, the author is overcome with nostalgia for the old Beirut that perhaps will never return and decides to stay.

Beirut Blues sheds light on the various conflicts in the Middle East—between Israel and the Palestinians, between Sunnis and the Shia, between secularism and a politicized Islam—by giving a human face to those ordinary men and women who are caught in the midst of a struggle but who do not seek to choose any side. Through her eyes, the reader is drawn into the downward cycle of destruction that is characteristic of civil wars. We become empathetic to her plight and each of us must ask the question of whether in her place we would stay or flee. But strangely, the novel is ultimately optimistic as the author finds moments of joy and love in the midst of despair and death, and we share in her hope that the Beirut she knew and loved will one day return. 🌍

SAMIRA ABDUL-KARIM '07 ON:

How to Choose a Loaf of Bread

On a Sunday afternoon last May my mother sent me to get sandwich bread at the grocery store—a simple task, she and I both thought. But after spending four months in Mombasa, Kenya, my local supermarket in Pennsylvania was a bit overwhelming. In Mombasa there were maybe two kinds of bread. It took all of a second to grab a loaf and move on. Here, I gazed up with wide eyes at the bread section, six tiers tall, five shelves wide, 15 strides from one end to the other. After 10 minutes of pacing between the French rolls and hot dog buns, I narrowed my choices to the racks of sliced loaves. Then the pressure was on to decide between rye, wheat, white, 12-grain, 10-grain, and five-grain.

I realized then that I had returned to the land of consumerism—a concept I hadn't really understood before that day. Finally, after seven and a half minutes of gaping at the bread aisle, nearly ready to storm off with frustration, I recognized one of the bread packages. I leaped at familiarity.

This is what re-entry to the United States would be for me: moments of astonishment leading to minor epiphanies about my own culture. Before I left for a semester abroad, even the idea that there is an "American culture" was foreign to me, and I would have never thought to call it my own. Now I realize that I hold values and expectations that make it clear to the rest of the world that I was raised and educated here. I expect not just justice and protection in the abstract, but that I will be able to personally ensure that I receive those things. And I am truly an American consumer. During my four months in Kenya, I contentedly rotated between three pairs of shoes: one for the shower, one for the rain, and another for everything else. When I got home I found I had a closet, a suitcase, and a cardboard box full of shoes. Some were still in their original packaging. I quickly saw that I was not only a member of this society; I was an active participant in the system. What did I want to do about that?

My program director assured all of us who went abroad that whether or not we realized it, we had changed. His seemingly paradoxical message was to not expect people to have changed as we had and also to not expect them to have remained the

same. With these expectations I entered the fall semester of my junior year confident and anxious to test drive the new me, perhaps too confident.

I started by reconnecting with old Wesleyan friends. Traveling alone, you learn the value of having friends who understand you without explanation. I also realized, however, that the pursuits I used to think so important—the identity clubs, cultural shows, dinners, and so on, were no longer fulfilling. I had spread my attention so widely that I had accomplished little. Now I wanted to spend every moment making the greatest impact on the world and people around me that I could. I resolved that I would dedicate myself to my closest friends and most important activities.

Mid-semester, in the midst of all of this self-discovery, I realized I had forgotten about academics a bit and my grades reflected that. The problem was overconfidence arising from my experience in Kenya, though I had a right to be proud about what I had accomplished. In Kenya I studied for midterms with four children hanging off each one of my limbs and five others competing for my attention. I conceived, designed, and orchestrated an original research project. I had learned a language, made good friends, and participated in a country and culture completely different from my own. After doing all that, I thought I could do anything—no, everything and all at once. Although I was still only a junior, in my mind I was already applying to grad school and getting fitted for my cap and gown.

Then, one night at 4:12 a.m., I thought about the position I had put myself in. I was taking four of the most demanding classes in my Wesleyan career. On top of that, I was working for 14 hours per week at three different jobs.

Fortunately, I checked my hubris while there was still some time to improve my GPA. Support from concerned faculty and friends helped me through. I ended the semester having learned more about myself, and how much remained for me to understand. The hardest and most important lesson was that learning never stops. Every event and experience holds the potential for learning, especially the ordinary ones—even buying a loaf of bread.



Samira Abdul-Karim '07