

currently **43°F** Overcast
 tomorrow High **41°F** Low **22°F**
 forecast provided by wunderground.com

Welcome: Charles Culbertson

Account | Logout

Search...

Archives

Latest News:

Barrier Buster

Iraqi Ex-Journalist Brings Native Tongue To BC

Posted: November 17, 2011
By **EMILY SHARRER**

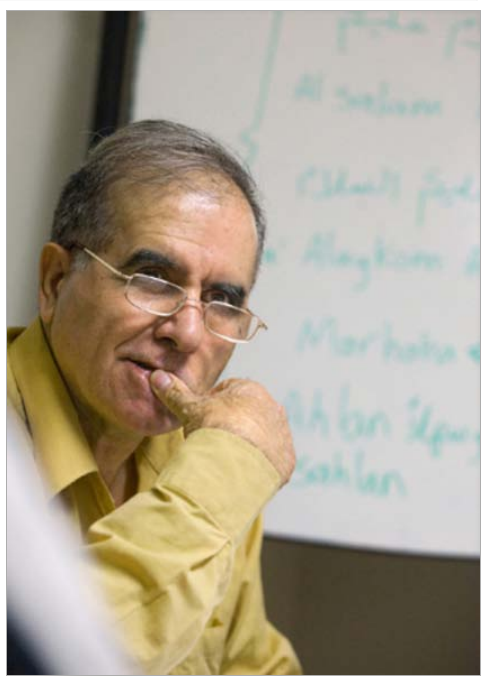
HARRISONBURG — At the beginning of the semester, Bridgewater College sophomore Lindsey Murad could not read Arabic any more than she could perform open-heart surgery.

But thanks to Maged Mahdi, an Iraqi refugee who fled his homeland after his life was repeatedly threatened because of his work as an investigative journalist, the 19-year-old Murad is now learning to read and speak the language, whose modern form can be traced to at least to the sixth century.

"I think it's amazing that we went from seeing scribbles to now [being able to sound out words]," Murad said of her class, which first met five weeks ago. "We can see the words."


Murad is one of eight Bridgewater students selected to take "Arabic for Beginners," a special course offering that's being taught pro bono by Mahdi, a former newspaper reporter from Baghdad who now lives in Harrisonburg.

Mahdi, 54, came to the United States four




"I want people ... to be more engaged in the [Middle Eastern] culture," says Maged Mahdi, Iraqi journalist turned Bridgewater College Arabic teacher. (Photos by Nikki Fox)

Advertisement



OVERSTOCK
52" TV's:
\$32.64

Get a 52" LED TV for \$32.64. Limit One Per Day. Grab Yours Now.



Virginia Teachers are in Demand.

Earn your degree in as little as 18 mos. Fin. Aid. avail. for those who qualify.

Wam!

Advertisement

Advertisement

Advertisement

years ago after threats by various religious groups upset at his reporting drove him from Iraq.

“It’s not easy to please everyone when you’re writing,” Mahdi said through his translator, 19-year-old Bridgewater sophomore Aseel Saied, on Thursday. “All the threatening wasn’t only toward journalists. It was also with doctors and scientists; they threatened to kill different people.”

In Harrisonburg, Mahdi continued his journalism career, publishing one edition of his own paper called the Arab Virginia News. Due to a lack of funding, the project has since been put on the back burner.

But teaching the Arabic course fulfills another of Mahdi’s passions — educating others about the Middle East.

“I thought it’d be very nice to introduce an Arabic class,” he said. “I want people to learn about [Middle Eastern] culture and to be more engaged in the culture.”

Immersion Technique

The class is taught using an immersion method: Mahdi speaks in Arabic during class and Saied translates, but only when necessary.

“It does help; we are picking up on the language really fast,” said sophomore Adam Welsh, 19, of Spotsylvania. “It’s probably one of the better language courses I’ve taken at Bridgewater.”

The college accepted one-page essays from students wishing to be considered for the course. Out of the 31 applications received, the pool was whittled down to eight students who agreed to attend every single class, which meets for four hours each week for the semester.

Bridgewater purchased the students’ textbooks for the course.

“I’m really glad [the college] offered it,” Welsh said.

Several of the course’s participants say that being well-versed in Arabic will allow them to communicate with family members of Middle Eastern descent.

“My dad’s from the Middle East and I wanted to learn [Arabic],” said Lindsay Davis, 21, of Winchester. “[He] was really excited that I was learning [the language]. We started talking slowly, but surely, in Arabic.”

Contact Emily Sharrer at 574-6286 or esharrer@dnronline.com



Bridgewater College senior Allison Hulvey, 22, offers a typical greeting in Arabic during a class taught by Maged Mahdi, a former investigative reporter and native of Iraq, at BC Thursday.



Advertisement

0 Comments

 Leave Comment