



Justin Ide/Harvard News Office

Emad Shahin '80, '83 is cool under pressure in the classroom Page 16

FEATURES

- 7 **LEBANON: A STORY OF RESILIENCE**
Alumni living in Lebanon recount their experience and anxiety during the war.
- 10 **WHAT'S NEW ON THE NEW CAMPUS**
Construction is proceeding on the new campus, and the information technology infrastructure is put in place.
- 16 **THE PROFESSOR OF PERSUASION**
Emad Shahin '80, '83 is an inspiration for his students at AUC and Harvard.
- 20 **CAMPUS LIFE 101**
The First-Year Experience program helps incoming students understand the ins and outs of AUC.
- 25 **WARMING THE WELCOME FOR REFUGEES**
Through its academic programs and extracurricular activities, AUC lends a hand to refugees.
- 30 **CAREER CHAMELEONS**
From banking to aerobics, alumni switch careers to realize their full potential.
- 33 **AMBASSADORS OF AUC**
Six regional representatives are working to promote AUC in the Arab world.
- 36 **A NEW ALUMNI CONNECTION**
Raymonda Raif '91 serves as alumni director, and Mary Iskander '76 continues to work with alumni in a new role.

On the cover: Incoming students take part in the First-Year Experience program, photographed by Ahmad El-Nemr

DEPARTMENTS

- 4 **AUSCENES**
O'Connor appointed as BEC dean, Stelzer awarded, vice president for continuing education welcomed, AUC and University of Zurich sign law agreement
- ALUMNI PROFILES**
- 15 Mai Khaled '85 recounts her days at AUC through her new book
- 28 Ben Wedeman (YAB '81), CNN's former Cairo bureau chief, treasures his time in Egypt
- 39 Ahmed El Attar '93 explores new avenues as theater director
- 39 **CLASS NOTES**
Class updates, weddings and deaths
- 40 **AKHER KALAM**
Ahmed Fath El Bab, mechanical engineering senior, leads a campaign to help war-torn Lebanon

The Professor of Persuasion

By Cole Gibas



Photo by Justin Ide/Harvard News Office

Stirring a sizzling debate inside his classes, Emad Shahin '80, '83 handles the heat with a cool calm

Remaining calm under pressure, Emad Shahin '80, '83 is adept at turning confrontational situations in the classroom into learning experiences. Currently on a two-year leave from AUC to teach and conduct research at Harvard University, the associate professor of political science has left an impression on many students who have attended his classes.

Chana Solomon-Schwartz, one of Shahin's Harvard students, was impressed with his professionalism. After an onlooker in his course on political Islam at Harvard began to attack Shahin for comments made about Al Qaeda, the AUC professor listened to his position, calmly responded and went on to stress the importance of this dialogue to the rest of the class. "He emphasized that while individuals may disagree, truth exists in such dialogues," Solomon-Schwartz said. "He was a powerful advocate of the understanding and interchange that is much needed in our world today."

Echoing the same sentiment, Reem Abu Zahra '06, who studied political economy at AUC, said, "Dr. Shahin teaches with passion and a sincere desire for arousing his students' interests and awareness of their nation's political problems. I feel he is trying to make his students think responsibly of their role in reforming their nation."

Janan Delgado, political science senior, especially admires Shahin's attitude toward his students. "I believe what makes Professor Shahin a remarkable teacher is first and foremost his commitment toward his students' formation and education. He believes in a lofty, higher purpose of education which inspires his students to be better persons, and along with him, fight against the mediocrity that hinders the development of our countries."

Delgado also pointed out that his lessons stretch far beyond the classroom. "Dr. Shahin

convinced me that we have an important role to play in society and that our responsibility is to be the best, not for any selfish reason, not to beat the other out there in the market, but to work with the other for the betterment of society. ... When you are in Dr. Shahin's class, you don't feel you are preparing for an exam, you feel you are preparing for the future."

With bachelor's and master's degrees in political science from AUC and a doctorate in international relations from Johns Hopkins University, Shahin has a long history of contributions in the field. He has taught at George Washington University in the United States and Al Akhawayn University in Morocco and has attended numerous conferences on Middle East politics. Most recently, he spent the 2005-06 academic year at Georgetown and Harvard universities, as part of a research grant for his new book. The grant allowed him to work at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown and in the legal studies department at Harvard.

In addition to researching his book, he served as visiting associate professor at the two universities, where he taught courses on comparative and Middle East politics. In recognition of his work, Shahin, who won AUC's 2001-02 Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching Award, has been invited to spend an additional two years at Harvard, teaching classes and researching his current book before returning to his post at AUC.

To Shahin, his experience at Georgetown and Harvard was both challenging and stimulating. "It's useful to be in a different academic and research environment," he explained, noting that the demand for scholars specializing in political Islam significantly increased after the 9/11 attacks on the United States. "What I contributed was a fresh perspective. Also, there is a growing interest in

my area of focus: political reform in Egypt. There were 85 students actually enrolled in my class, but sometimes there would be approximately 120 people who would come to my lectures.”

One challenge Shahin faces in the United States is adjusting to different student audiences. “Teaching Egyptian politics there is a lot different than teaching it to Egyptians here,” he stated. “A book on colonialism will have a completely different effect on Egyptian students at AUC than on American students at Harvard,” he pointed out.

Shahin added that teaching political Islam to a class full of Egyptians would require a different starting point than teaching it to a typical class in the United States, since students’ approaches and historical knowledge vary greatly between the United States and Egypt.

His U.S. students, in turn, appreciated his knowledge and interest in students. Nomnso Kal, a senior majoring in government and Near Eastern languages and civilizations at Harvard, studied contemporary political Islam with Shahin and admired his ability to back up his arguments with facts and solid information.

“Professor Shahin was very good at playing devil’s advocate when he was teaching and could just as easily argue an Orientalist point of view as well as he could argue that of the Muslim Brotherhood,” Kal said. “He enjoyed engaging students and welcomed challenges to both what he said in class and what students found in the readings. Not all the students in our class wanted to hear what he had to say, but he was always able to identify places for us to look to try and understand the other’s point of view. I

thought that it was admirable how Professor Shahin exhibited grace under fire. Despite the occasional heated disagreement, he always handled himself well.”

Similarly, Ingrid Wassmann, an American graduate student who took a course on political Islam with Shahin at AUC, explained how his perspective is insightful to those from outside the Middle East. “He taught us that we need to keep in mind that political Islamist movements, wherever

“Professor Shahin was very good at playing devil’s advocate and could just as easily argue an Orientalist point of view as well as he could argue that of the Muslim Brotherhood.”

they may arise, like Hamas or Hezbollah, appeared for a reason, as a reaction to a larger context, to specific conditions,” Wassmann said. “This may seem like a very obvious thing to say, but more often than not, it seems that in today’s world, not enough people understand nor want to accept or even consider this possibility as a reality. ... I believe that what I gained from Dr. Shahin is to be proactive, committed, concerned and engaged in the community we live in.”

It was not only in class that Shahin presented his arguments well, but also during scholarly engagements. While at Harvard and Georgetown universities, he gave nearly 10 public lectures, many on the democratic processes in Egypt. “It really sharpens your skills,” Shahin said. “You have to be ready to engage in academic

exchanges with people from think tanks and other intellectuals. It keeps you energized and up-to-date.”

Besides teaching, Shahin is busy establishing himself as a published scholar. Working on his current book, which is due to be finished by the end of this year, Shahin is the prolific author of numerous academic articles and book chapters. He is the co-editor of *Democratization in the Middle East and North Africa*, set to be published in late 2006. His first book, *Through Muslim Eyes: Muhammad Rashid Rida and the West*, 1993, offers a comprehensive account of the influential Islamic figure. He is also author of *Political Ascent: Contemporary Islamic Movements in North Africa*, 1997, in which he compares Islamic movements in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, examining their roots, nature and ideology. His argument states that these movements have expanded since the 1960s in response to the marginalization of Islam and the perceived failure of imported development models.

His current book, however, is an analysis of major debates among Arab intellectuals during the past century. Shahin finds that although there have been some gains, agreeing on many of the subjects of contention has remained elusive.

“Many of the issues that we think are current have already been raised and subjected to vigorous debate,” he said, noting that despite a century of discussion, the file is not closed. “We are still arguing about women’s issues in the same way it was debated 150 years ago,” he said. “We are not building on this debate to achieve a breakthrough or create our own model of development.” Shahin referred to women’s role in society, their dress and education as topics of

“You have to be ready to engage in academic exchanges with people from think tanks and other intellectuals. It keeps you energized and up-to-date.”

disagreement that have spanned generations.

According to Shahin, the issues that were a source of academic and ideological contention in the past and continue into the present include identity, political community, education, women and the status of Copts in Egypt. “It’s difficult to achieve political development without agreeing on a basic framework and major values that should guide political life and society,” he said, pointing out that religion’s role in society is one of the many aspects that intellectuals fail to agree upon. “Hopefully this book will serve as a kind of critical analysis of the way debate has taken place between Arab intellectuals that has unfortunately led to hostility and the inability to reconcile differences,” he said. “How can you build a political community without agreeing on a framework? We don’t have a native Arab political liberalization model. We don’t even have a shared Islamic model.”

While many may blame the political system in the region for the lack of progress, Shahin attributes the problem to the struggle between traditional and modern values in Arab society. “It is still in a phase of transformation,” he said. “The roles in society have not yet been reconciled. Unfortunately, there are two systems developing side by side without any bridges.” □



Justin Ide/Harvard News Office