

ORD-> JFK; Leaving Khalil Center

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Hey y'all,

So I'm done with my internship and am back home in NY, getting ready to head back to NOLA this week. It took me a while to actually sit down and get all my thoughts out about this summer because wow, it's been incredible.

Chicago is an amazing place (the pizza is not as good as NY pizza) but still its just so pretty and so full of wonderful people and places. And to me, it'll be the place where I had so many "aha moments" about so many different things. I learned about mental health and Islam, which I expected. But I didn't expect to learn so much about myself in the process. I didn't expect to meet so many wonderful people and get so attached. Chicago holds a special place in my heart.

Going into my internship, I really just wanted to see how religion and psychology are linked, how culture can put taboos on psychological issues and how to get rid of those taboos. Midway through my internship I saw how spiritual wellness can translate to a better quality of mental health. And by now, I see how regardless of cultural taboos, help is being offered and sought out; it can only get better. During my time at Khalil Center, I was able to see and read about so many different mental health issues, and to see (and read about) real people who were affected by these issues. Due to the confidential nature of the center I can't go into a whole lotta detail, but for someone like me, interested in counseling and psychology it was just an incredible life experience being in the office.

The clinicians at Khalil Center are people I'm glad to know and that I think I'm better for knowing. They were welcoming and kind, and some of the most generous people I've ever met, their bios are up online (link in 1st post) so you can read about their credentials, but to know them, be lucky enough to sit with them and get to know them, for me, that might have been the best part of my internship. They're funny and down to earth, caring and brilliant (also, one of them has really comfortable reclining massage chairs in his office). To see such generosity and value for others, such willingness and ability to help anyone, it was inspiring to say the least. I've been keeping in touch since I left, and I really hope to remain in touch and go back and visit. I had such amazing supervisors and feel so lucky to call them friends too. So in my last post, I talked a lot about the youth group (no update on the name yet) that one of my supervisors, Sabaahath, had started. I wanted to talk a little bit about the womens group at Khalil Center too, (the woman who started that, Sameena, I fangirl her too). The group, called "*Jawharat al Islam*" or "Jewels of Islam" runs various programs for muslim women around Chicago. (Women, by the way are the "jewels of Islam; Here's the link (<http://www.khalilcenter.com/jawharat-al-islam.html>)).

Groups like Jawhar give me a sense of pride to be a muslim woman, it reminds me how high the status of women is in Islam; that's pretty empowering. They offer loads of events and support groups, seminars and really cool lectures. On my last day, I went to a Jawhar event where a guest lecturer, Dr. Rania Awaad, came from

Stanford to talk about the ways muslim women could connect with their religion. It made me step back and think for a second –women are really amazing. We are intelligent, emotionally and scholastically, we are strong and we are gentle, is there anything we can't do?

Watching Sabaahath and Sameena be these empowered, educated, amazing women creating such important spaces, and pulling it off so perfectly, it kind of blew my mind. It is possible. It is so possible to effect change. So I left Chicago with these two amazing role models and this desire to take what they've showed me and use it in any way I can. I'm going to miss being around them and their contagious good energy.

I wish I could put into words how much I gained from my experience because it was more than just role models and knowledge. Everything I did at Khalil Center now matter how long it took or how small it was, it taught me something. I feel like being around everyone at the office gave me more of a sense of what kind of person I want to be. I admire the work they're doing and hope to go back there, and be a part of that work. If anyone's in the Chicago area during the year, Khalil Center offers full time undergraduate and graduate internships; I think because of the religious and cultural aspects of the center, it helps to know Arabic and maybe Urdu but it's not a setback at all if you don't. KC is also a great place to volunteer, they do some amazing events and hold some really interesting conferences, (as does Jawhar). It's been a great summer and I've loved every part of it; I'm sad to leave Chicago, but happy to be home and excited to head back to NOLA!!