Terrorism Minor Students Visit Ground Zero

College Park, MD– As part of their course in Responses to Terrorism, students in the Terrorism Studies Minor at the University of Maryland traveled to Ground Zero in New York City. Throughout the spring semester, these students have been studying the impact of terrorism on groups and individuals. Traveling to the site of one of the attacks they had studied in class brought the experience to a more personal level for the students.

The students were split into two groups for the tour of the site, one led by 9/11 firefighters, Danny and Bobby, and the other led by a Red Cross volunteer and a 9/11 rescue worker, Annie. The first stop on the tour was the bronze sculpture on the side of the Engine No. 1 Fire station, located just across the street from the site. Danny explained that the helmets of all the firefighters displayed the number of firefighters killed that day, 343. He personally knew nearly 80 of those 343 firefighters who lost their lives.

As they continued on the tour, the students noticed that the city itself, over 6 years later, is still in repair. Until the students were at the actual site of the attacks, they had not yet realized the damage to the surrounding buildings. While circling the site of the new World Trade Center building, Freedom Tower, students walked under the scaffolding of surrounding buildings. According to New York City construction code, condemned buildings must be disassembled piece-by-piece. One building, which suffered water damage from the attempts to stop the fires on September 11, 2001, is still in the deconstruction process.
The tours traveled around Ground Zero, mostly inside the doors of the World Financial Center, adjacent to the site of the attacks. Looking out over Ground Zero and visiting the memorials dedicated to the victims of 9/11, the Maryland students listened to the stories of the tour guides and what they witnessed on that day. By meeting people who were a part of the rescue efforts, the students were able to truly understand the far-reaching effects of the attacks.

Gabriel Band, a student on the trip explained, “Relating to an event as horrific as 9/11 requires digesting not only the factual events of the day, but also the emotional ties to those events. The informative sessions on the events of 9/11 combined with the personal stories of that day allowed me to integrate both the factual and emotional dimensions that comprise 9/11, and allowed me to truly understand New York city on that infamous day.”

After finishing their tour at the Tribute Center, the students traveled to John Jay College of Criminal Justice to meet with representatives from the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), Faiza N. Ali and Aliya Atif. The students had also been studying the effects of terrorist attacks on specific groups of people, primarily Arabs, Muslims, and those thought to be Arab or Muslim. Faiza and Aliya discussed the work that the New York Chapter of CAIR has done, including specific cases that they have been a part of. They described the racial profiling, hate crimes, and delays of citizenship that many Muslims and Arabs have faced since the events of September 11. In some cases, CAIR has even moved beyond the defense of civil rights of Muslims to work with those of other religions facing similar issues.
“For many Arab/Muslim Americans and foreign nationals [September 11] was a day in which their civil liberties were no longer guaranteed; a day which led to a rise in hate crimes against Muslims and the passing of some of the most comprehensive immigration policy in decades. For many American men/women it was a day in which they made the decision to join the armed forces and take part in the soon declared and highly controversial ‘War on Terrorism’.”

– Sabrina Hammouda

Although students were aware of the presence of an increase in racial profiling, especially toward this community, they were surprised by exactly how many people could be affected at one time. Faiza and Aliya described how hundreds of people of Arab descent, both Americans and foreign nationals, were held for hours at a U.S. airport without being told of their offense. The students were deeply disturbed by a system that would treat travelers in this way.

The University of Maryland students had been debating the issue of racial profiling and what it means for civil liberties and national security in class. Many students wished for more time with the CAIR representatives to delve into the issue more deeply. They were specifically interested in hearing and debating solutions to the racial profiling, citizenship delays, and the other offenses that CAIR works to resolve.

The students in the Terrorism Studies Minor Program blame not only individuals, but also institutions for these offenses against civil liberties. As Jenna Burton explains, “The abundance of hate crimes is unfortunate and anti-patriotic in my opinion, but what is more upsetting is the justice system’s response. Even when all of the facts in some cases align perfectly with hate crimes, they aren’t being prosecuted that way (learned from CAIR).”

Intel Analysts

After completion of the CAIR presentation, the students met with Intel Analysts from the NYPD over lunch to discuss career options in Law Enforcement. The Intel Analysts are part of the NYPD’s Counterterrorism Bureau, one of only a few counterterrorism bureaus in the country. (http://www.nypdshield.org/public/default.nypd

Cory Ellis was surprised and excited by this career opportunity. As he commented, “It was interesting to learn of yet another way agencies are attempting to increase national security.”

Reflections on the Tour

Students expressed their appreciation for the efforts of those like the firefighters, Red Cross volunteers, and others that made such a difference on 9/11. They also realized that recovery from terrorist events is a longer process than even they could have imagined without hearing the personal accounts of Danny, Bobby, Annie, and the others.

Many students were hopeful about theirs’ and others’ abilities to respond to events of terrorism. As Laura Mitchell commented, “Although 9/11 produced immediate action, we continue to recover with the efforts of many. Institutions such as CAIR can lead us to reinstating our values and unite as a cohesive American people rather than alienate. Meanwhile, we must not forget about those who were directly affected and maintain our support.”
“I believe that the country’s stability and security lies firmly in the integrity of our education and the active pursuit for continued knowledge. This conviction in accordance with our trip to New York City has only reinforced my respect and dedication for the terrorism minor program and educational institutions that encourage similar studies.” – Krista Juris

Terrorism Studies Minor Program at the University of Maryland

The Terrorism Studies Minor Program [http://www.start.umd.edu/education/undergraduate_minor/](http://www.start.umd.edu/education/undergraduate_minor/) is a cross-disciplinary program housed in the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences at the University of Maryland. The minor is designed to train the next generation of terrorism analysts, including students who plan to pursue graduate study related to terrorism as well as employment in the federal, state, local, non-profit, and/or corporate sectors. The minor is one of many educational programs that START supports for undergraduates and graduate students. While the Terrorism Studies Minor is available only to UMD undergraduates, START also has educational opportunities for students from around the country and around the world. Information on these programs is available at [www.start.umd.edu/education](http://www.start.umd.edu/education).