START Sponsors Student’s Participation at West Point

College Park, MD, November 4, 2007 - Sabrina Hammouda, a student in the University of Maryland’s Terrorism Studies Minor Program, was selected to serve as a delegate to the Student Conference on United States Affairs (SCUSA). The 59th Annual Conference, “Uncertain Future: Freedom, Security, and Responsibility” was held October 31 – November 3, 2007, at the United States Military Academy (USMA) in West Point, New York. START sponsored Ms. Hammouda’s application to this conference and funded her participation.

SCUSA brought together hundreds of students and dozens of security scholars and policy experts from the United States and abroad. Delegates to the conference participated in round tables and panel discussions that examined a full range of foreign policy issues and topics of concern to the United States.

A total of 18 roundtables convened under regional and thematic areas. The nine regions represented were Central and Eastern Europe; Russia and Central Asia; Sub-Saharan Africa; Western Europe; China, Japan and Korea; Middle East Gulf States; Latin America and the Caribbean; South and Southeast Asia and Oceania; and The Middle East, North Africa, and the Horn of Africa. The nine thematic roundtables included Homeland Security; Global Social Concerns; The Challenges of Terrorism; State-building and Democratization; Globalization; The Challenges of Insurgency; The Role of Non-State Actors; Domestic Sources of Influence on Foreign Policy; and Proliferation of Weapons and Materials.

Each roundtable was co-chaired by two experts in the field. The co-chairs moderated debate among the participants and coordinated the production of policy proposals generated during the group’s discussions.

Sabrina Hammouda took part in the Challenges of Terrorism Roundtable, co-chaired by Dr. James Carafano and Dr. Assaf Moghadam. Dr. Carafano is a leading expert in defense affairs, military operations and strategy, and homeland security at The Heritage
Foundation. Dr. Moghadam is a research fellow at the Combating Terrorism Center at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard University’s Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. Dr. Carafano and Dr. Moghadam led participants in a debate on the challenges of terrorism, including its many definitions and the urgent need for translations of terrorist organization documents.

In addition to roundtables, the conference also featured panel discussions. One panel participant, Brigadier General Victor Corpus, a retired general from the Armed Forces of the Philippines, left a strong impression on Hammouda. As she explained, “It was good to have a point of view from someone who wasn’t American or socialized in the United States. Maybe U.S. hegemony is declining, but [General Corpus] pointed out that people still look to us. What the U.S. government does really translates to other countries and foreign policy. We always have to keep this in mind.”

The conference hosted a mix of military and civilian attendees. Hammouda noticed the different approaches that military representatives took in their response to terrorism, compared to those she encounters in her study of terrorism at Maryland. “The military mostly looks at terrorism as a tactic of warfare. Their responses are directed toward combating the tactic, not looking at the motivations of the individuals involved. I have an entire class based on motivations.”

Exposure to these diverse approaches was one of the most memorable aspects of the conference to Hammouda. “It is important to have both perspectives: civilian and military. With [the Iraq] War, the leaders of the military have to be able to talk to top policymakers in DC and each know their role but work together. We need to take into account both perspectives and find a way to converge the two.”

Hammouda was grateful for the opportunity to attend the SCUSA Conference, where she witnessed these diverse perspectives. She hopes that other students will have similar opportunities to both test and share what they have learned in the classroom. Hammouda plans to directly apply her experience at the conference to her career in government and politics. She has seen the value of considering different options and perspectives before taking action. As she explains, “in choosing to enter a conflict, often you only think about ultimate gains, but you should really weigh all the costs and benefits.”

For more information on the SCUSA conference, please visit their website at www.dean.usma.edu/sosh/Conferences/scusa/index.html.

Sabrina Hammouda is a student in the Terrorism Studies Minor (www.start.umd.edu/education/undergraduate_minor/), 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.