

Dear UWC community,

I write to you from Cairo where at the beginning of this year I founded the Cairo Institute of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CILAS). As a non-profit, CILAS strives to enable students from diverse backgrounds to access liberal arts education through affordable study fees and scholarships. In order to be able to welcome 40 students in September, we urgently need to raise money.

The toppling of the Mubarak regime induced a burst of artistic expression and political fervour in Egypt, but also a general sense of disorientation. The 2011 revolution exposed the crisis at the core of Egyptian society – a crisis that centres on feelings of frustration amongst unemployed youth. Today, Egypt's naturally vibrant youth lacks direction, self-confidence and leadership. However, despite their internal and social turmoil, Egyptians face a window of opportunity for change. At CILAS, we envision an institution that studies and engages with the social realities in Egypt and the Middle East by providing a platform for young people to explore and develop their ideas with guidance.

We offer both high school and college graduates a yearlong bridge programme that prepares them for selective university programmes and professional life. Introductory and thematic courses in the fields of Arts, Culture, Social and Natural Sciences will provide students with the intellectual foundation to engage in analytical discussion, debate, creative inquiry and collaboration. As with the International Baccalaureate, CILAS promotes experiential and applied learning. The former is emphasised through community service, of which students complete 20 hours every trimester; the latter is exercised during development and community-oriented projects at the end of the second and third trimesters.

In addition to its taught programme, CILAS aims to create development-related knowledge in a language accessible to all stakeholders of governance, i.e. government, civil society and the private sector. CILAS' fellows will analyse local and regional development challenges with academic rigour, and collaboratively produce content for CILAS' annual online journal. The Institute shall serve as an intermediary body with links to academia, government agencies, corporations and civil society as to facilitate communication between them. Fellows are thus not only responsible for teaching but also creating, and integrating regionally and locally relevant knowledge across disciplines, in the field of development and governance.

Currently, CILAS requires funding towards three channels: scholarships, fellowships and building/equipment maintenance. We want to offer both partial and full scholarships to one in four of our students, amounting to approximately 8,500 Euro in total. As we are looking to maximise the impact given what we have, myself, the assistant programme director and each of the eight fellows will earn 555 Euro per month, amounting to a total of 55,000 Euro for the academic year. The cost of school equipment such as whiteboards and computers is our priority for now: we aim to raise a sum of roughly 9,000 Euro to cover these expenses alone.

I write to you all in the hopes of raising the profile of this initiative amongst those of you concerned with educational equality, social justice and good governance in Egypt and the Middle East. Any and all donations, no matter how small, will be greatly appreciated. Your input and financial support, as well as help in spreading the word, would provide us with the phenomenal momentum to push forward.

Thank you in advance for your interest and support.

Kind regards,  
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