

Institute for Public Diplomacy & Global Communication

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY



FINAL REPORT:

“Connecting Cultures: Cultural Diplomacy and Engagement Workshop”
September-October 2023

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Executive Summary

Creating Connections: A workshop on cultural diplomacy and engagement was organized by the Institute for Public Diplomacy and Global Communication (IPDGC) with the GW Corcoran School of the Arts and Design in the fall 2023 semester. The hybrid workshop was open to GW students who expressed interest in learning about international engagement programs. A total of 15 GW students participated in the workshop.

Instructors from the non-profit American Voices conducted training on the mechanics of cultural diplomacy and engagement programing. The trainings were held virtually except for a one-day session which was held at the Flagg Building of the Corcoran School on the GW campus.

American Voices has been the implementing partner for two of the U.S. State Department's longest-running cultural exchange programs for more than 20 years. The workshop gave the participants the opportunity to get training from two principals at the nonprofit, and hear from artists, performers, and cultural engagement practitioners, including former US public affairs specialists. There were discussions and group activities providing the participants with a better understanding about the purpose and impact of these programs, as well as the challenges of constructing an international cultural engagement program.

From responses collected in our evaluation questionnaire, the participants found the workshop to be informative and useful. Several participants planned to continue their journey into international engagement, while others came away with a better appreciation for cultural diplomacy.

The workshop served the broader goals of IPDGC as well as the Walter Roberts Endowment, to inspire best practices and professional development in the field, as well as to encourage more dialog and activities among people from different walks of life and increase awareness for public diplomacy.

Major Activities

I. Program concept and design

The workshop was conceptualized with the objectives of broadening awareness of cultural diplomacy programs and encouraging interdisciplinary collaborations. The GW Corcoran School of the Arts & Design agreed to be a host partner following meetings with Deputy Director Mary Coughlin and several heads of department at the School. The target audience would be GW students from across the disciplines – reserving some space for students from Corcoran and Elliott School programs.

Designed as a hybrid workshop, costs could be reduced. Training partners American Voices were able to provide lowered costs for training and honorariums, leveraging on a longstanding relationship. The workshop sessions were over a total of five days, with one in-person session held at the Flagg Building, Corcoran School.

II. Partners/ Practitioners (knowledge experts)

John Ferguson, Founder and Executive Director, American Voices

Amr Selim, Program Director, American Voices

Session presenters:

Elie Sawma, pianist – Lebanon

Damelari Olaniyan, cultural entrepreneur - Nigeria

Wed Dawina, singer – Sudan

Zaineb, hip-hop dancer - Kurdistan/Iraq

Silvya Lo, musical theater - Indonesia

Ruba Shaqi, filmmaker – Yemen

Awad Awad, theater director – Palestine/Lebanon

Ifteakhar Hossain, hip-hop – Bangladesh

Joanna Sherman, Artistic Director, Bond Street Theater

Amb. (retired) Janet Garvey, former US Ambassador to Cameroon

Yvonne Oh, former Public Affairs Specialist, US Embassy Kuala Lumpur

III. Funding

The Walter Roberts Endowment Advisory committee approved funding support for a portion of the workshop with the remaining costs covered by IPDGC. (See Appendix III)

IV. Participants

Lisa LeBourgeois	MA Global Communications, Elliott School of International Affairs
Elisa Duran-Ballen	BA Fine Arts, Corcoran School of Arts and Design
Georg Gauger	International Affairs (Hertie School, Berlin); Exchange student at Elliott School of International Affairs
Xiaodi Wang	Interaction Design, GWU
Ty Lackey	MFA Social Practice, Corcoran School of Arts and Design
Shawn Shafner	MFA Social Practice Art with an Emphasis in Public Policy, Corcoran School of Arts and Design
Pauline Perrotin	ESIA International Affairs Major (freshman)
Charles Smeltzer	MA International Science and Technology Policy, Elliott School of International Affairs
Emily Lamb	Master of Public Policy, Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration
Angela Wang	MA International Affairs, Elliott School of International Affairs
Thejasvi Ramu	MA in Media and Strategic Communication, School of Media and Public Affairs
Matthew Snow	MA Global Communications, Elliott School of International Affairs

Hajrah Jalil	International Development Studies, Elliott School of International Affairs
Eason (Yuchen) Lee	MA in Global Communications, Elliott School of International Affairs
Theresa Hale	Title IV Program Coordinator, Institute for Middle East Studies, Elliott School of International Affairs

V. Reflections (survey responses) and recommendations

Participants were asked to evaluate the program on a Google form. There were four respondents – the poor response was attributed to the midterm exams at the time. However, the respondents were able to share their high level of satisfaction about learning more about public diplomacy programming. Their interests were focused on creating a relevant program and finding funding. The participants found the one-on-one conversations with the trainers to be very informative.

A difficulty noted by a participant was the structure of each session: “I felt that it was a bit of trial by fire - and I wonder how more scaffolding could have been set up to move us forward, specifically from the first session into the first draft.” Another said that “I was a bit confused about our project. I assumed it would be a 'mock project' but there seemed to be the expectation that we actually implement it.”

- Recommendation: Trainers should create more structure with the presentation and share more detailed information to explain the components that build a cultural program. While the participants were interested in cultural programming, there were occasions when there was confusion about what each presentations was about.

Another participant said that the in-person session was better for engagement and getting feedback from other workshop participants.

- Recommendation: Having a shorter workshop or in-person final sessions may work for better experience and engagement that transfers knowledge efficiently. This can be achieved with a better budget; a hurdle that can be overcome with improved fundraising.

Overall, the participant responses were positive, and the workshop had a significant impact on the participants’ knowledge and raised confidence about their ideas on cultural programming.¹

¹ Participant Tyler Lacky (Master of Fine Arts in Social Practice, 2024) was selected to be part of the US State Department’s Spring 2024 OneBeat cohort. He attributes the guidance and support from the workshop as crucial for bringing this opportunity within reach and equipping him with the skills, language, tools, and ideas.

Connecting Cultures Cultural Diplomacy and Engagement Workshop

Program Overview:

- **Friday, September 15:** Zoom workshop, 1pm-4pm EST
- **Friday, September 29:** In-Person workshop at the Flagg Building (500 17th Street, NW Washington, D.C. 20006), 9:30am – 5:30pm EST
- **Friday, October 6:** Zoom workshop, 1pm -4pm EST
- **Friday, October 13:** Zoom workshop, 1pm -4pm EST
- **Friday, October 27,** Zoom workshop, 1pm -4pm EST

FOR ALL ZOOM SESSIONS, PLEASE CONNECT HERE:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88920916179?pwd=WHJ0bkEyRDNiMEZkU0VvWnVhRnpWUT09>

Contacts:

American Voices trainers: Jonathan Ferguson (john.ferguson@americanvoices.org) and

Amr Selim (Amr.Selim@americanvoices.org)

IPDGC Program Coordinator: Yvonne Oh ipdgc@gwu.edu

Day 1
Friday, September 15, 1-4pm
Zoom

Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88920916179?pwd=WHJ0bkEyRDNiMEZkU0VvWnVhRnpWUT09>

1:00-1:15pm Welcoming Remarks

William Youmans, Institute for Public Diplomacy and Global Communication
Mary Coughlin, Corcoran School of the Arts and Design

1:15-2:00pm Introduction

John Ferguson & Amr Selim, American Voices

Cultural diplomacy, cultural engagement, and the value of global exchange. Participants will begin to develop a program proposal.

2:00-2:45pm Primary Session: Make a Friend Far, Far Away

In breakout rooms, participants will get to meet some of American Voices' overseas partners

- ❖ *Elie Sawma, pianist – Lebanon*
- ❖ *Damelari Olaniyan, cultural entrepreneur - Nigeria*
- ❖ *Wed Dawina, singer – Sudan*
- ❖ *Zaineb, hip-hop dancer - Kurdistan/Iraq*
- ❖ *Silvya Lo, musical theater - Indonesia*
- ❖ *Ruba Shaqi, filmmaker – Yemen*
- ❖ *Awad Awad, theater director – Palestine/Lebanon*
- ❖ *Ifteakhar Hossain, hip-hop – Bangladesh*

2:45-3:00pm Break

3:00-3:20pm Activity Feedback

Participants will receive initial feedback on their project proposals.

3:20-4:00pm Closing and Next Steps

Day 2

Friday, September 29, 9:15am - 4:30pm

In-Person at the Flagg Building (Room 219)
500 17th Street, NW Washington, D.C. 20006

Directions:

Enter Flagg building using New York Avenue doors.

Go straight to the atrium in the middle of the first floor; head up the grand staircase on the right then through the rotunda. Go up another set of stairs to the second floor.

Room 219 is the first classroom straight ahead from the stairs.

9:15-9:30am **Welcome and introductions**

9:30am -12:30pm **Session One: Creating Programming That Matters to the Host Country**

Participants will deepen their understanding of how to operate in a challenging environment, the value of long-term engagement, and how to seek alternative sources of program funding during interactive activities. Participants will develop and hone elevator pitches for a variety of contexts.

Joanna Sherman, Bond Street Theater

12:30pm-1:30pm **Networking Lunch (Room 222)**

1:30pm – 4:30pm **Session Two: Funding Your Programming**

Funding options and the life cycles of budgets, grants, monitoring, and reporting will be discussed in depth alongside private foundation grants. Participants will learn the intricacies of “State Department-ese” during interactive breakouts and align project objectives with mission goals

Amb. (retired) Janet Garvey, former US Ambassador to Cameroon

Natasha Basley, former Cultural Affairs Officer

Yvonne Oh, former Public Affairs Specialist, U.S. Emb. Kuala Lumpur

Day 3 and Day 4
Friday, October 6, 1-4pm OR Friday, October 13, 1-4pm
Zoom

Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88920916179?pwd=WHJ0bkEyRDNiMEZkU0VvWnVhRnpWUT09>

10 participants each session. 30-min **one-on-one** sessions with 10 participants reviewing and providing feedback on their full proposal. *Participants will receive information on their designated session in the immediate coming days.*

Day 5
Friday, October 27, 1-4pm
Zoom

Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88920916179?pwd=WHJ0bkEyRDNiMEZkU0VvWnVhRnpWUT09>

1:00pm **Final Presentations**

Participants will present their final project proposals to the group in 5-7 minute presentations.

3:15-4:00pm **Closing Remarks**

Speaker Biographies

American Voices

John Ferguson, *Founder & Executive Director*

In 1992, John Ferguson founded American Voices to fulfill the need for authentic cultural engagement programs with the newly independent nations of central and Eastern Europe. Since then, the focus of American Voices has expanded to include a focus on nations emerging from conflict or isolation in the Middle East, North Africa and Central, South and Southeast Asia.

In 2007, he founded the innovative summer youth performing program, YES Academy, in Iraq. The program has since expanded to Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Indonesia and Thailand. The YES Academy programs have been featured on ABC Nightly News, PRI Radio 'The World' and CNN in the United States and viewed by millions in local broadcasts in the YES Academy nations. In addition, John Ferguson founded the first international jazz festivals in Azerbaijan, The Caspian Jazz and Blues Festival (2002-2005), and Kazakhstan, Almaty International Jazz Festival (2003-2004).

Ferguson serves as director of the YES Academy, Youth Excellence on Stage, programs in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Afghanistan, Malaysia, Sudan, Pakistan and Indonesia. His innovative work in the field of cultural engagement was given a national award at the Summit for U.S. Citizen Diplomacy in November, 2010 where American Voices was named one of the 'Top Ten Best Practices Organizations' along with Sundance Institute and the Kennedy Center.

Amr Selim, American Voices

Music Director of International Programs

Amr Selim is a musician, educator, cultural entrepreneur, and community leader born and raised in Cairo, Egypt. His work has taken him to most of the Middle East, Europe, and the USA — whether collaborating, performing, teaching, or speaking, Amr aims to advocate for a thoroughly decolonized and inclusive performance and education climate. His endeavors can be seen through his publications, guest talks and lectures, membership of the *Presidential Task Force on Leading Change in Music Education*, and co-chairing the *International Initiative Committee* at the *College Music Society*.

Dr. Selim is a former professor of Music at the *Lebanese American University* and has held posts at *Adelphi University* and *Stony Brook University* in New York, at which he earned his Doctorate in Musical Arts as a *Staller Scholar*. As a musician, described as “expressive and ghostly wailing [playing] of a kind never heard from the instrument before” Amr has worked closely with renowned artists, conductors, and ensembles such as The Silk Road Ensemble and Yo-Yo Ma, Emerson String Quartet, Imani Winds, Daniel Barenboim, Frank Shipway, Christopher Muller,

Ingo Metzmacher, and Gunther Schuller.

At American Voices, Amr is working extensively on international projects such as YES Academies, the Heart of Afghanistan, a new Cultural Diplomacy endeavor, organizational development, and the Arts Envoy Program sponsored by the U.S. State Department.

Organizers

William Youmans, *Director, Institute for Public Diplomacy and Global Communication; Director, M.A. Global Communications Program; Associate Professor of Media, Public Affairs and International Affairs.*

William Lafi Youmans is an associate professor at the George Washington University's School of Media and Public Affairs. Broadly interested in questions of transnationalism, power and communication, his primary research interests include global news, law and politics. His other areas of interest include researching terrorism, American international broadcasting, Middle East politics and Arab-American studies. He is regularly quoted in outlets including Salon, the Washington Post, Newsweek, Variety and The New York Times, among others. He also appears on radio and television programs including CBC Radio, WAMU (NPR), Headline News, Al Jazeera English and ARD. Dr. Youmans has published a regular column for the Gulf News and authored articles in the Washington Post, Middle East Report and Nieman Journalism Lab.

Dr. Youmans wrote a book, “Unlikely Audience: Al Jazeera's Struggle in America” (Oxford UP, 2017), about the Qatari news network's efforts to gain a share of the news market in the United States. His paper on CIA recruitment in Arab Detroit won the 2013 Best Paper award in the International Communication Section of the International Studies Association. It was published in early 2017 in *The Communication Review*. Dr. Youmans presents at academic conferences including the annual gatherings of the Middle East Studies Association, the International Communication Association, the National Communication Association, the International Studies Association and the American Sociological Association

Mary Coughlin, *Deputy Director, Corcoran School of the Arts & Design; Associate Professor and Head of Museum Studies Online Certificate*

Professor Coughlin has an interest in the conservation challenges of contemporary museum collections, particularly with respect to plastic. Before coming to GW full time, she worked for five years in the Objects Conservation Laboratory of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History where she conserved objects as diverse as FDR's leg braces and Star War's C-3PO and R2-D2.

Coughlin is a 2005 graduate of the University of Delaware Winterthur Program in Art Conservation where she specialized in Objects Conservation and Preventive Conservation. She is a Magna Cum Laude graduate of Mary Washington College with a BA in Historic Preservation. Beginning as a graduate intern in the Objects Laboratory at the Smithsonian's National Museum of

American History, Professor Coughlin has also served as a Samuel H. Kress Fellow, a Smithsonian Postgraduate Conservation Fellow, and as an Objects Conservator, all at NMAH.

Yvonne Oh, *Program Coordinator, M.A. Global Communication, Institute for Public Diplomacy and Global Communication, Gender Equality Initiative in International Affairs*

Yvonne is the Program Coordinator and manages the Institute and the MA program in Global Communications. She also coordinates between the School of Media and Public Affairs and the Elliott School of International Affairs for programs and events. Yvonne moved to the US in 2016 from Malaysia, after many years working in Public Affairs at the U.S. Embassy Kuala Lumpur. She has been a journalist and has worked in communications development in Southeast Asia. Her experiences in Public Affairs have allowed her to get the inside view on all manner of bilateral engagement: government-to-government, business and trade, education, media, culture and arts, and civil society. She is convinced that the best part of these experiences have been the relationships developed through the programs.

Speakers

Breakout rooms

Elie Sawma, pianist – Lebanon
Damelari Olaniyan, cultural entrepreneur - Nigeria
Wed Dawina, singer – Sudan
Zaineb, hip-hop dancer - Kurdistan/Iraq
Silvya Lo, musical theater - Indonesia
Ruba Shaqi, filmmaker – Yemen
Awad Awad, theater director – Palestine/Lebanon
Ifteakhar Hossain, hip-hop – Bangladesh

Joanna Sherman, Bond Street Theater

Founder & Artistic Director

As a director, choreographer, musician and actor, Joanna has initiated and participated in company projects in East Asia, South America, Eastern and Western Europe, the Middle East, Pakistan, India and Afghanistan. Under her directorship, Bond Street Theatre received a MacArthur Foundation Award for its interdisciplinary and intercultural programming.

Ms. Sherman has a BFA in Fine Arts from Cooper Union, and an MA in Theatre & International Studies from New York University. She received a Distinguished Achievement in the Arts Award from NYU in 2004, Torch of Hope Award from the Baroness Foundation, and Lee Reynolds Award from the League of Professional Theatre Women. She is the recipient of an Exploration Fund grant from Arts International and travel grants from the Trust for Mutual Understanding, Theatre Communications Group, and the US Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

Ambassador Janet Garvey (ret)

Former U.S. Ambassador to Cameroon

Janet Garvey spent 33 years in the US Foreign Service, retiring at the rank of Minister Counselor. She served as the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Cameroon from 2007 to 2010 where she instituted a number of programs to fight corruption, promote international security and respond to health crises. Prior to Cameroon, she served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Budapest where, among other responsibilities, she oversaw the work of the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA). Other overseas assignments included Bosnia, Germany, Finland, South Africa and Yugoslavia.

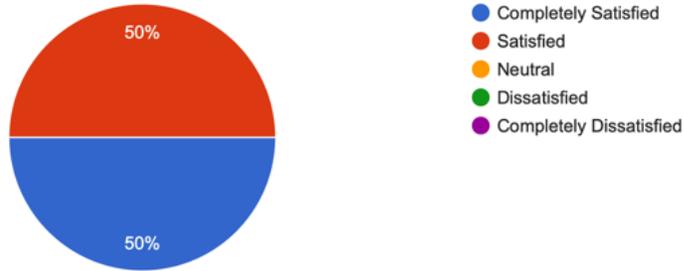
Yvonne Oh, *former Public Affairs Specialist, US Embassy Kuala Lumpur (1998-2016)*

Yvonne is currently the Program Coordinator for IPDGC, and the MA program in Global Communications. In 2016, she immigrated to the US, leaving behind her public affairs career. She continues to leverage on the knowledge and experiences from the time.

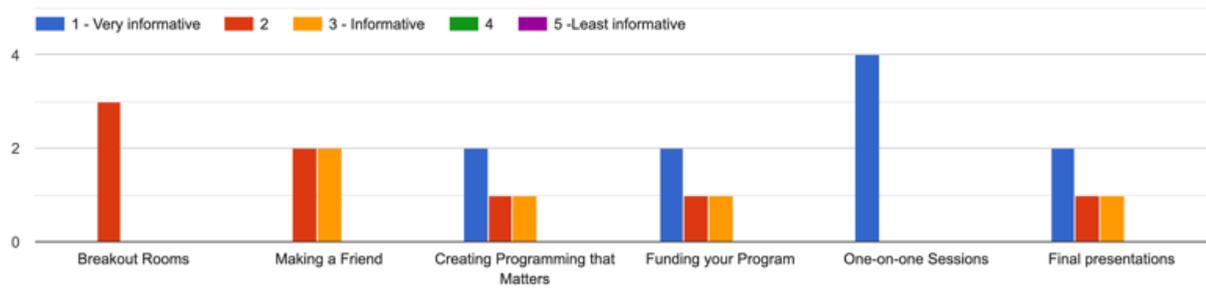
Survey responses

1. Did the workshop meet your expectations about learning cultural diplomacy programming?

4 responses

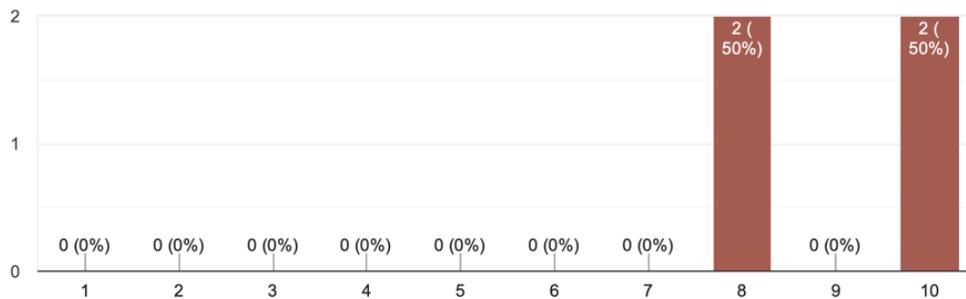


2. Please rank the following sessions which stood out to you as more informative or applicable to you (from 1 being most informative/applicable to 5 being least informative/applicable):



5. On a scale of 1 to 10, how likely are you to recommend this workshop to a colleague or friend? (1 being highly unlikely, 10 being highly likely)

4 responses



Budget

<u>Honorariums</u>	
Workshop trainers	\$4000
Session presenters	1050
Travel to DC (flight and local transport)	1400
Hotel	1040
Catering	405
Miscellaneous	20
TOTAL	\$7915