

For Immediate Release



## **AUB's MDLAB encourages increased media and digital literacy education in the Arab region**

Beirut, Lebanon- 25/08/2014 - From stereotypes of women in Arab cinema and the effects of violence in computer games on children to decoding misleading messages in advertisement and refuting rumors during war and other topics, 60 Arab students and academics created several media and digital literacy projects that addressed real problems from the Arab world. In the midst of the continued crises and uncertainties facing the region, a group of media academics, students, and professionals from across the Arab world gathered to examine the role of media in society, while learning to produce digital narratives of hope and unity. The second annual Media and Digital Literacy Academy of Beirut (MDLAB) was held from August 10 through August 23 at the American University of Beirut (AUB), aiming to advance digital and media literacy within the Arab region by training a generation of Arab academics, students, and activists to develop a locally rooted media literacy curricula and to build competencies that help them harness the power of digital media and critical thinking. "The enthusiasm and eagerness to learn about media and digital literacy among our participants this year created a sense of optimism about the state of media and digital literacy in the Arab region, especially given the dire situation the region is going through," said Lubna Maalki, the director of MDLAB. "I am proud that we managed to gather students and faculty from nine Arab countries this year."

Participants came from 23 universities in Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Oman, Palestine, Syria, UAE, and Yemen.

Sponsored by the Open Society Foundations, Al-Monitor ([www.al-monitor.com](http://www.al-monitor.com)) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), MDLAB 2014, which is organized by the Media Studies Program at AUB, featured renowned international media and digital literacy education experts Dr. Sut Jhally, who discussed propaganda and media coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Dr. Susan Moeller, who lectured about the power of images in documenting and framing human rights violations, and a Skype lecture by Dr. Paul Mihailidis, who covered the relationship between media literacy, civic engagement, and global citizenship. Arab scholars included Dr. Nabil Dajani, who critiqued the over-attributed role of social media in the Arab uprisings, Dr. Irada Zaidan, who examined the portrayal of Arab women in the media, and Dr. Abeer Al-Najjar, who covered biases and limitations of journalism today. During his lecture entitled the Occupation of the American Mind: the Spectacular Success of Israel's Public Relations Campaign in the US, Dr. Jhally discussed the ways Israel has used media to its advantage: "The US and Israel have to make sure that American public opinion does not clearly understand the international consensus—so what is actually clear, has to be made confusing. How do you do that? Through the manipulation of public relations."

A panel of columnists and contributors from Al-Monitor, moderated by Marita Kassis, Al-Monitor's Beirut-based managing editor, discussed the experiences and challenges of reporting from the field in their various regional home countries.

Other topics covered during the two-week academy included: media literacy and human rights, media literacy's role in the Arab region, news coverage of human rights violations,

Arab media ownership patterns, media portrayal of marginalized communities, media and religion, sectarian hate speech and free speech, and representations of gender, sexuality and body image.

Participants analyzed different media and gained hands-on experience creating content through the use of various media programs, such as Wordpress, Instagram, audio editing, podcasting, and a special session on data visualization and the analysis of Twitter feeds. Discussing her experience during the academy, Maha Al Wazir, an Egyptian participant who works as a teaching assistant at Cairo University, stated, “I really enjoyed the lectures, sharing various experiences and [hearing the] visions [of] professors coming from all over the world.”

Both presenters and attendees alike enjoyed the beauty of AUB’s campus and touring throughout Lebanon during the two weeks of the academy, as their numerous photos shared via social media sites communicated to friends and family back home. Professional connections and new friendships were formed, demonstrating the power that media literacy can hold in bringing this kind of diversity together.

Launched in summer 2013, MDLAB is managed by a core team of AUB Media Studies academics, including MDLAB co-chairpersons Dr. Jad Melki and Dr. May Farah, MDLAB director Ms. Lubna Maaliki, and AUB professors Mr. Toni Oyry and Dr. Hatem El Hibri.

For more details about the 2014 program and participants along with lecture videos and notes, please visit: <http://mdlab2014.wordpress.com/>

MDLAB is an initiative of the Media Studies Program at the American University of Beirut: [www.aub.edu.lb/mediastudies](http://www.aub.edu.lb/mediastudies)

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**For more information please contact:**

Maha Al-Azar, Director of News and Information, [ma110@aub.edu.lb](mailto:ma110@aub.edu.lb),  
01-75 96 85

**Note to Editors**

**About AUB**

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the bachelor’s, master’s, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full service 420-bed hospital.

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