



ROCHESTER AND SYRIA

People

- 3 alumni living in Syria in fall 2015
- 4 students from Syria in fall 2015

Syria Consortium

The University has identified and supported students from Syria as part of the Institute for International Education's Syria Consortium for Higher Education in Crisis. Rochester has been one of the few research universities from the Association of American Universities to participate since the consortium's launch. The first two Syrian refugee students enrolled in August 2012.

Historical Journey

Henry Augustus Ward (1834-1906)—a professor of natural sciences at Rochester from 1861 to 1875—traveled through the Middle East, including the Syrian Desert, in 1855. He chronicled his experiences in a diary that's now held by Special Collections in Rush Rhees Library. In the pencil-written journal, Ward describes the people, historical sites, and—fittingly—the natural phenomena that he found, writing in one instance that the Syrian “desert spreads out like an ocean on either side while we pass from hill to hill.”

Global Rochester: Syria

A Rochester junior organizes support for victims of his homeland's civil war.

Omar Soufan '17 has spent the past two years helping his fellow Syrians recover from the trauma of his homeland's internecine civil war.

Along with roommate and friend Ibrahim Mohammad '17, the biomedical engineering major from Syria has organized a rehabilitation center in Lebanon. The facility, sponsored by the Syrian American Medical Society, tends to wounded Syrian refugees, many suffering from paralysis and amputation as a result of injuries suffered in the war.

“You don't need a reason to help your people,” says Soufan, a Renaissance and Global Scholarship recipient. “When your country is literally burning to the ground in front of you, don't expect other people to help if you don't do something about it yourself.”

So far, Soufan and Mohammad have raised \$3,700, along with \$2,200 in donated equipment from a defunct medical facility. According to the Syrian Medical Society, which also provides some financial support for the initiative,

more than 1.4 million Syrians needed medical treatment in 2014 alone. With one physical therapist and four doctors, Soufan's clinic receives about 15 patients per day.

Last August, Soufan traveled to Lebanon to supervise the installment of the equipment. He also served as a translator between a psychiatrist visiting from the United Kingdom and patients suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome, and he traveled briefly to Syria.

Soufan was born in Chicago in 1994, when his mother was visiting her brother, an anesthesiologist. His entire family is from Syria, and that's where he grew up, along with his younger brother and sister.

He returned to America in 2011 and enrolled at the College of DuPage outside of Chicago. After two years, he enrolled at Rochester.

There, he met Mohammad, a Palestinian refugee living in Lebanon. Together, they are doing what they can to help strangers in need more than 5,000 miles away.

“It's our job to find the solution,” Soufan said.

“Not someone else's.”

—Jim Mandelaro



HELPING HAND: Omar Soufan '17 (above), with roommate Ibrahim Mohammad '17, has organized a rehabilitation center in Lebanon to help wounded Syrian refugees. Soufan was raised in Syria.

