One of the goals of the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures at Gustavus Adolphus College is to bring an international perspective to teaching, advising, and research. We engage our students and ourselves with the world by developing an appetite for a certain type of knowledge, one that opens the doors to other cultures, histories, and literatures. Experience on the spot is often the most practical way to convey this knowledge. Such was my experience during the summer of 2006 when I went to Tunisia with the intention of better understanding the Maghreb, engaging a longtime interest in the lands of Northwest Africa. Having received a Bush Foundation mini-grant in support of new research aimed at my teaching, I began a study of French colonization in North Africa and its repercussions on history, culture, and literature up to the present.

The Arabic term *Djazirat el Maghreb* means the Island of the Sunset or the Island of the Occident. The Maghreb encompasses Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. The original inhabitants of this region were the Berbers. But the Maghreb is conditioned by the Mediterranean coast, the Atlas mountain chains, vast deserts, and the fertility of the lands irrigated by its rivers. Over the centuries this geography attracted many invaders, among them the Arabs, who have stayed the longest and who have been the most influential, making the Maghreb an integral part of the Arab world. The French presence in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia began in 1830, and ended—in the case of Algeria—in 1962.

Starting my work at The Fourth International Conference on New Directions in the Humanities at the University of Carthage, in Carthage, Tunisia, I presented a paper titled “Algeria, a Land of Conflicts and Reconciliations. A literary approach to understanding Algeria, past and present. Hélène Cixous and Albert Camus.”

The conference, whose theme was “Global and Local Dialogues in the Humanities,” was aimed at engaging Muslim and Western worlds in a region at the crossroads of their cultural differences. The inevitable complex dialogues provided means for seeking mutual comprehension and philosophies to reconcile these differences. The varied and rich conference sessions were attended by representatives from 22 countries. Topics ranged from the prospects and problems facing Africa and the Middle East in claiming their identity representations and intellectual properties, to European understanding and acceptance of multiculturalism, diversity, and human rights in the Islamic communities.

From Carthage, I went to Tunis where I did research with the American Institute for Maghreb Studies (AIMS) at the Centre d’Etudes Maghrébines in Tunis (CEMAT). Established in 1984 the institute works to facilitate scholarly research on North Africa and to en-

*The ruins of the ancient city of Carthage are located on the eastern side of Lake Tunis, across from the center of modern Tunis, Tunisia's capital city.*
courage the exchange of scholars and scholarly information. In the United States, AIMS serves as the professional association of scholars interested in the Maghreb. At the CEMAT, I worked with various scholars who had received Fulbright grants or, like me, grants from their home institutions. The dialogues and work the center allows are of great importance for establishing a better understanding of Northwest Africa and its relationship to the Western world in a way that is at once open and informed. These dialogues are aimed at bringing about a better comprehension of Islam in the world.

Culture is history-bound—it cannot live without it, it evolves with it. And in the Maghreb, as in the rest of Africa and the Middle East, history repeats itself and constantly shuffles its cards, hoping to avoid past mistakes (both their own and those of the colonizing powers). I had a great opportunity to witness how the desire for freedom and peace is challenged daily, and to see how it is interwoven in the lives of every person.

Understanding how the Arab world functions and where it fits in the puzzle of nations is essential. Its construction is often fragile. During my stay in Tunisia in 2006, the war between Israel and Lebanon broke out and the pieces of this very delicate puzzle began scattering about the region. Any attentive Westerner in the Arab world at that moment had the clear opportunity to understand firsthand how past mistakes can easily be repeated with tragic consequences. Lebanon is a small country, a tiny country by geographical measure, yet it is large in its acceptance of diversity: Lebanon makes heroic efforts to blend together its various communities by accepting and respecting each other’s differences. One could not help asking: Couldn’t Lebanon constitute a solution for our divided world? Why did it have to suffer again? The civil war that ended 15 years ago and the ensuing reconstruction was long and thorough and ultimately successful. What was achieved in the recent war? Widespread destruction and promises to help reconstruct. The absurdity of such responses to such hapless events speaks for itself.

My goal at the CEMAT was to better understand French colonization of the Maghreb, and the aftermath in that region. I undertook a comparative study of Tunisia and Algeria in their approach to French identity and language as they freed themselves from years of cultural, economic, and political occupation.

Tunisia gained its independence in 1956, while...
A tale of the Maghreb
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Algeria did so in 1962 after protracted combat between the French army and Algerian resistance and insurrectionary groups (all quite divided in their approach to a settlement). Habib Bourguiba was the first president of independent Tunisia, his major goal being to maintain secular control over the Tunisian schooling and administrative systems. Thus, Muslim groups had less influence and power in governing the country. Bourguiba also maintained the use of French throughout the school curriculum; the result of this was that after independence Arabic was introduced progressively and had more time to establish itself in the system than it had, for instance, in Algeria.

Algeria’s journey to independence was much more complex and difficult than Tunisia’s. Tunisia had been a protectorate of France, while Algeria was a “department” (the equivalent of a state or province in the North American continent). At the time of the insurrections calling for independence, a total of one million European colonizers—mainly from France—lived in Algeria, where there were eight million Algerians. The battle for independence lasted from 1954 to 1962, and was extremely violent, involving as it did, so many French “colons” who considered Algeria their land and had no intention of returning to France. France, on the other hand, was not eager to repatriate them because of the imbalance it would create in its economy and politics.

The last part of my work took place in Paris where I continued my research on Algerian independence and the years of political turmoil that continued into the beginning of this century. I refer specifically to the Algerian civil war of the 1990s that lasted nearly the entire decade. The ’90s are an important era in Algerian history. These were years of bloody warfare between Islamist movements on one side and the government and the army (two entities not always in concordance) on the other. The army and the government furnished weapons to a militia in charge of defending the population against the Islamist factions.

I carried out the latter part of my research at the library of the Institut du Monde Arabe (IMA) in Paris. The mission of the IMA is to build bridges between two civilizations that need to know each other better and are, in fact, eager to deepen their relations. The Institut’s arena of intent is vast: culture in all its aspects, science, knowledge of customs, and large political problems, always approached with an open mind and spirit.

This year, I have been sharing the results of my research in Tunisia and France with my students and colleagues. How often do we talk about our scholarly work with our students? Although we think they might not be interested, they actually are. Frequently they do not know what we really do outside the classroom. They need to perceive us as teachers and scholars, educators and researchers, and see that these are not two separate entities with no correlation. These two aspects of our work at Gustavus Adolphus go hand in hand and do not stand as a divide in our professional lives. Grants such as those from the Bush Foundation help us invite our students to experience our research, and inspire them to investigate into new subjects.

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A market scene in Hammamet, a coastal town in Tunisia.

Briefly . . .

Building Bridges
Investigative journalist Lisa Ling was the keynote speaker at the College’s 12th annual “Building Bridges” student diversity conference held on March 10. Ling, who reports on issues of social justice for various television shows, said that we live in a time where we can find a wealth of information on the Internet, most of which is not reliable, and that we are responsible for seeking out the truth. Her message was part of the 2007 conference theme “Find Your Voice: Putting Awareness into Action.” The Building Bridges conference is an annual student-led, student-initiated diversity conference organized to promote mutual respect and understanding of diversity and to deal with diversity in a proactive, social, and informative way.

Fulbright winner
Erica Duin, a senior international management and French major, has been granted a Fulbright Scholarship for the 2007–08 academic year. Duin, a native of Hastings, Minn., who developed a passion for Morocco during a 2006 summer internship with the