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CMU journalism prof travels to Saudi Arabia as scholar, consultant

MOUNT PLEASANT — A member of Central Michigan University’s journalism faculty recently returned from a stint as a visiting scholar at a Saudi Arabian university, and his experience was chronicled in a popular newspaper-industry journal, allowing him to share his story with the rest of the world.

John K. Hartman, a professor of journalism at CMU, served as Al-Jazirah Chair for International Journalism at the all-male King Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and also acted as a consultant to the editor of Al-Jazirah Newspaper, Saudi Arabia’s most influential daily newspaper. He delivered a major lecture on U.S. journalism trends and gave seminars for KSU students and Al-Jazirah reporters.

Editor & Publisher posted “A U.S. Journalism Prof Teaches in Saudi Arabia,” a first-person account of Hartman’s experiences, on its Web site May 21 as part of the publication’s “Shoptalk” feature.



Courtesy photo

“I learned that the Saudis care deeply about journalism and want to learn how to do it better, just like those of us who care about journalism in the U.S.,” Hartman wrote in the column. “I went there to tell them how we do journalism in the U.S., not to tell them how they should do journalism. Journalism practices reflect the unique history and culture of our respective countries.”

Hartman, whose final lecture to KSU students ended with “to be continued ...,” said that while he looked forward to his return to the U.S., he also was sorry to leave Riyadh, the students and the Al-Jazirah staff, and he is already planning a return trip.

“In a larger sense, I see my role as helping to promote understanding between the two nations, and I look forward to resuming my teaching and consulting there in the fall,” said Hartman of the experience.

In his column, Hartman reflected on the need for understanding and the experience of being an American in Saudi Arabia.

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“Some Saudis are not crazy about us. In one rest room I saw the ‘USA’ scratched out on a hand drier. They are concerned about the way Muslims are often portrayed as villains in U.S. movies and media; that women are often portrayed as sex objects in western media, which runs counter to Muslim beliefs; and that some U.S. citizens display a superior attitude toward the Saudis and other Arab people,” he wrote. “Yet my wife Kay and I could not have been treated better. Our hosts, journalism professor Ali Alkarni and mass communication department chair Ibrahim Al Baeyez, saw to all our needs.”

He hopes that the trip — and future trips — “will enhance CMU's growing international reputation and may open up opportunities for faculty and student exchanges. The experience also gives me firsthand information to share with students and professionals.”

Hartman’s position was one of 50 visiting chairmanships in a variety of academic disciplines at KSU. The positions were created “to bring international scholars to Saudi Arabia’s largest university,” he said.

To read Hartman’s Editor & Publisher column, visit <http://bit.ly/a9NzU>.

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