

2 WKU seniors from Crestwood looking forward to Arabic debate competition

For two seniors from Crestwood, Western Kentucky University's Arabic language program has opened the door to a world of opportunities.

Keightley Dudgeon and **Kassidy Orrender** are among four WKU students who will be traveling to Qatar in March to compete in the fifth International Universities Debating Championship.

Both are looking forward to the competition and to returning to the Middle East.

Dudgeon, who is majoring in Arabic and Teaching English as a Second Language, spent the past two summers in Jordan and Morocco on intensive language programs. Orrender, who is majoring in Arabic with a minor in Political Science, also completed an intensive Arabic language program in Jordan and worked as an intern for a nonprofit that works with the refugee population in Catania, Italy.

"I can honestly say that both have these experiences have changed my life and who I am as an individual," Dudgeon said. "I would say that I am much more adaptable and open-minded after these experiences. I have also met so many different people and been shown incomparable hospitality and true friendship; I think that is the most valuable takeaway. My study abroad experiences have been a highlight during my college experience."

After she graduates from WKU this spring, Dudgeon hopes to work as an English teacher in a foreign country, preferably in the Middle East. "I have found in my past travels that it is much easier to connect with people when you speak their language," she said. "So hopefully, speaking Arabic will facilitate both meeting new people and thriving as a working adult in this new setting."

Orrender agrees that learning and speaking another language can break down barriers. And, after graduation, she hopes to find a job with a nonprofit agency that allows her to work with refugee resettlement.

"I love helping people to feel comfortable, understood and heard, and I hope to always use Arabic to accomplish that," Orrender said. "Regardless of where I end up in the future, I am confident that the language will always be a large part of my life. It helps me love people better, and there is nothing more valuable than that."

WKU will be one of five U.S. universities participating in the international competition, hosted by QatarDebate, that brings together Arabic and non-Arabic speaking students from around the world to Doha, Qatar, for six days in mid-March.

Since being selected for the team in late November, Dudgeon, Orrender and seniors **Madi Crawford** of Hendersonville, Tennessee, and **Noah A. Stevens** of Elizabethtown have been preparing for the competition and are enrolled this spring in an Arabic debate course taught by Lhousseine Guerwane.

“The students have been preparing since they were selected, even during the winter break they were submitting two assignments a week that I corrected and gave feedback on as they learn how to debate and improve their Arabic language skills,” Guerwane said. “The students also attend the Arabic Debate Club two hours a week and submit online assignments weekly. In addition to learning about debate and practicing debate skills, students also are working on exercises to improve their listening skills, pronunciation, body language, confidence and vocabulary.”

WKU launched its Arabic language major in 2014 and the program has grown to more than 50 students. This will be the third year Guerwane has taken students to debate competition in Qatar.

Dudgeon and Orrender encourage current and prospective WKU students to consider the Arabic program.

“If you have the opportunity and even the slightest interest in learning a new language, do it,” Orrender said. “The things you learn about the world from stepping into a new language is something you won’t find in any other major. Our Arabic professors are incredible -- easily the kindest, hardest-working, most dedicated people I have ever met. They are so passionate about helping students succeed and work hard to ensure that the learning process is fun. There are few things I believe are more beneficial to your understanding of the world than learning a new language, and few things that will make you more competitive in the job market after graduation.”

Dudgeon said she has enjoyed studying the complex and rich language and meeting international students who speak Arabic. “The department is well-equipped with dedicated and enthusiastic professors who work passionately to provide students with every possible opportunity for successful language acquisition,” she said. “There is also a great takeaway past

learning the language itself. You will learn about the Middle Eastern culture through Arabic language learning. And hopefully, you will meet people who speak the language too.”

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