

# INScription

Department of International Studies (INS)

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# A WARM WELCOME

I hope the spring semester is off to a good start for you! 2022 has arrived with many COVID-powered challenges. There is no doubt that the shift to the four-day work week is a progressive move to achieve a better work-life balance; it does require some adjustments in various aspects of teaching and learning. Despite all the uncertainties, I am happy to report that our department has continued to grow. Currently we have around 350 degree-seeking undergraduate students. Our faculty is offering more than 60 sections this semester, providing a large number of major courses and making significant contributions to the general education curriculum.

The faculty members in our department are among the most productive researchers on campus. In the current academic year, eleven faculty members have applied for the 2022 cycle of Faculty Research Grants. Some of them have applied for external grants. To acknowledge their outstanding research output and commitment to our institution, three colleagues have been awarded sabbatical leaves for the Academic Year 2022-2023. In addition, we are working diligently to search for the most qualified teacher-scholars to join our team to enrich students' experiences. Most excitingly, we are exploring the possibility of building a graduate program that draws on the exciting strength of the department and the BAIS program and empowers students seeking a career in the foreign service.

The Spring 2022 semester is going to be a busy time packed with activities and events. The much-anticipated AUSMUN annual conference is going to take place at the end of February. We have also planned monthly department colloquia, including a special session scheduled in April when a winner of this year's Undergraduate Research Grant will present his research findings. Please stay tuned for the announcements of upcoming events.

Our department has also grown in other ways. Last October, we welcomed the arrival of baby Zorah Niamh Lusk, the newest member of the Lusk family. Following a short maternity leave, Dr. Jeniece Lusk has returned to teach this semester. Dr. Bethany Shockley is now on maternity leave taking care of her newborn son. We expect her return in Fall 2022. Congratulations to both Dr. Lusk and Dr. Shockley.

A new year always brings new hopes and new opportunities. I hope this newsletter will keep us connected and inspired. Let us know if you would like to get involved with this small monthly publication. I wish you all a successful and productive semester!

Dr. Yuting Wang  
Interim Head  
Department of International Studies

# MEET THE NEW FACULTY

In each issue of INScription, we ask one or two faculty members to tell us a bit more about themselves. In this issue, the faculty members under the spotlight are Dr. Salma Thani and Dr. Rachel Blaser, who joined us in January as visiting faculty.

## Dr. Salma Thani

I was born and raised in the UAE. I grew up on the east side of the country, where mountains were on my doorstep. My childhood was quite adventurous. My extended family and I went fishing, camping and the beach almost every weekend. Weekend picnics were very much part of my childhood. My siblings, cousins and I used to love being taken to the parks. We would all play games together. Malls were there, but not many. The only major malls in Dubai were Al Ghurair, Al Mulla Plaza and Bur Juman. I witnessed the years when the UAE dunes gave way to skyscrapers, luxury villas and malls. I always preferred the outdoors to malls, though. I was all for outdoor activities and picnics. Picnics really brought us all together as a family every week. My family has been my most significant support. My father has been my inspiration. When I was a child, he spent hours talking with us about global affairs, society, politics and humanity. One day, he came to me and asked me to become a doctor. How could I pursue medicine when he had already nurtured my interest in global affairs! I attended Sharjah Higher Colleges of Technology for the sole reason that it was close to my hometown. But, little did I know that the experience at college would transform my personality from an introvert to an extrovert. I realized that I wanted to do more in college and pursue my higher education overseas. After graduating from Higher Colleges of Technology, I went to Melbourne, Australia, and earned my master's and doctorate degrees from Monash University. I also worked at Monash for some years, teaching courses in international studies, where my passion lies. I lived in Melbourne for nearly a decade, and it was like a second home. Now, I am back where I started my journey from—the Great University City of Sharjah.



## Dr. Rachel Blaser

I grew up on a farm in rural Nebraska (USA), where we had at various times sheep, pigs, ducks, horses and even a peacock. I majored in psychology in college and instantly fell in love with research—my favorite class was Psycholinguistics, or how the brain learns, understands and produces language. I learned two important lessons from my research as an undergraduate: (1) I definitely wanted to spend my career doing more research, and (2) I definitely did not want to do it with human subjects (they're a real pain to work with!!). So, I pursued my graduate degree doing research on learning in honeybees, who are far more compliant and have fewer scheduling conflicts. Although I still do research on learning (and use rats, zebrafish and humans as well!), recent events around the world have made me really appreciate how important scientific literacy is for everyone—not just college students and future scientists. Whether people are deciding whether to get a vaccine or figuring out how to respond to climate change, valuing and understanding scientific information is essential to making the world a better place. So, I've more recently turned my attention to the psychological principles at work when we use (or don't use) scientific information to make decisions. Scientists still have a lot to learn about how to present research in a way that is accessible and engaging to the rest of the world!



# MEET THE STUDENTS



In each issue, we will invite one or two students to share their feelings about college life or showcase their achievements. Feel free to contact us if you would like to participate! In this issue, we invited two of our brilliant students, Alyazia and Amaan, to share with us their recent achievements.



## A Young Writer

*Mohammad Amaan Siddiqui*

My name is Amaan and I am a second-year international studies major. As your eyes flow over the next few sentences, I'll take you on a journey about my passion for research and writing and hope that my story inspires you. Passionate about my major and social issues, I also wish to improve the world. As I continue to find means to do so, I write to create written revolutions and prepare for larger steps through my major and minors (economics and environmental policy). Constant perseverance, and the willingness to pivot and develop, seek advice, observe real world scenarios, put time into research and make sure I enjoy what I do has allowed me to stay resilient in this path. As my commitment and capacity for research, writing and changemaking grew, I wanted to do bigger things, too. Thanks to this and a well-written pitch, I was able to secure a CAS research grant for the question "What is the impact of online feminism on Twitter and Instagram users?" last semester. In a world with overflowing data, my interest in research and that question arose also because I wanted to understand data better, and even create it to enhance scholarship and make tangible progress in the respective fields.



## An Aspirant First-Year Student

*Alyazia Alkrad*

Hello everyone, my name is Alyazia and I'm a first-year student at AUS. As some of you may know, we have won a competition by gathering the most points in the most recent episode of "Field of Knowledge" that featured our university in a Sharjah TV Competition. To say the least, my experience on the show was unforgettable. While it wasn't my first time being on TV, the intensity of the competition was nerve-wrecking yet fun. I am incredibly happy and pleased with how we represented not only ourselves, but also the university as a whole, with excellent leadership. The staff and faculty on the set were great as well, instructing and supporting us professionally and helped us loosen-up. My favorite part was that we ended with a supportive conversation and walked away with memories that will be forever cherished, instead of the exhaustible cash prize from the golden question. Overall, I would also encourage you all to believe in yourself, ground yourself to reality and take less stress, and don't forget the friendship of your teammates or the journey to the destination you were aiming for.

# FALL 2021 IN REVIEW

## International Studies Student Association (INSA)

The International Studies Student Association is committed to its mission to stimulate political, social, and economic discussions and debates on campus in order to engage AUS students with the world's recent issues. We have, to our best abilities, delivered a safe and engaging environment for said discussions and debates during the fall semester. We invited students from all colleges to our first INSA Majlis on the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. The event hosted two professionals from the field, Dr. Mansa King from INS and Dr. Vidya Diwakar, an AUS alumna and Research Fellow at London-based Overseas Development Institute (ODI). Dr. King spoke to us about the poverty eradication techniques in the religion of Islam, which many of the students found interesting and relevant to our part of the world. On the other hand, Dr. Diwakar presented us with rich statistical evidence she used in her own studies. The event indeed sparked the conversation we aimed to host on our platform. Students from INS and other majors engaged in debate and discussions with each other, professors and other professionals in the field.

## AUS Model Congress (AUSMC)

AUS Model Congress 2021 was a festival of events, insights, ideas and discussions. Over the last year, AUSMC held several events to enhance learning on the current issues in the United States and develop useful skills. Starting off with two sessions of AUSMC Debates in the summer, we were able to engage four qualified students in a discussion on relevant topics, giving them an opportunity to speak their mind and hone their communication skills. Second, AUSMC held a panel discussion to inform students on what the US Congress is with Dr. Alejandro Bonvecchi and Dr. Vernon Pederson from INS. Third, AUSMC held a research workshop with Dr. Maya Aghasi of the AUS Department of English assisting every senior struggling to publish a stellar paper. Fourth, AUSMC hosted an interactive workshop on visualizing ideas with Dr. Kristen Highland of the AUS Department of English. These events culminated into AUSMC's annual conference: the Govern-Pitch Competition. This two-day event was hosted using the pitch format where each team was given a relevant issue in the US, and presented a solution. Standing by its motto "if you don't like the rules, rewrite them," AUSMC strives to continue making a positive difference and giving students a platform to rise, and know about their strengths, while exploring the pressing issues of the largest economy in the world.

## AUS Model United Nations (AUSMUN)

Over the last semester, AUSMUN organized several successful events including PINKTOBER and UN Day. PINKTOBER event was held on October 12, 2021 via Zoom with renowned clinical dietician and breast cancer survivor Tina Chagoury. The event was an emotional experience that inspired everyone. Moreover, the celebration of UN Day was a remarkable event for AUSMUN because it provided a background on how the UN came to be and it shed light on the struggles of refugees, with guest speaker Bisan Salameh, Officer at UNHCR at the UN Refugee Agency. The event took place on October 19, 2021 via Zoom and was filled with curious attendees.

## Psychology Club

The Psychology Club at AUS is dedicated to advocating for mental health and wellness, delivering research-based psychoeducation, and promoting awareness campaigns to combat stigma and misconceptions. To achieve these goals, the club held several events during the fall semester. One key event focused on men's mental health. Coach Michael Leonard, Middle East Mental Health Ambassador Ally Salama, and podcast host and AUS student Ali Mortada discussed societal stigmas and the effect of upbringing on the way men express emotions or discuss mental health in general. The club also hosted an online workshop on positive psychology. Club President Neimat Elkarib provided an overview of the field, highlighting the benefits of implementing positive psychology practices to cope with the demands and rigor of university. Students then joined breakout sessions: one a guided breath practice with psychology professor Dr. Angela Maitner and another on flow and play with visiting psychology professor Dr. Katherine Green.



## Other Departmental Events

The department organized two alumni events and three department colloquia in Fall 2021, involving three alumni, two faculty members and an external speaker.

## Psi Chi

AUS launched our chapter of Psi Chi in April 2021, becoming the first chapter of the international honors society in psychology in the UAE. The purpose of Psi Chi is to promote excellence in the science and practice of psychology. This fall, we organized the first psychology alumni panel at AUS, welcoming back four AUS alumni who have gone on to graduate school in psychology. We joined Psi Chi's International Partners and Leaders (IPALs) program, partnering with Florida State University. Together we held regular book club meetings discussing Oliver Sack's *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*. We are also a member of Psi Chi's 2021-2022 International Collaborative Exchange collaborative research project, and established a social media and online presence for our chapter. Psychology majors and minors who've completed 45 credits and score in the top 35th percentile in CAS are eligible for membership, which provides them with lifetime benefits including opportunities for financial grants and scholarships, publication venues, information on career opportunities and networking mixers.



# UPCOMING EVENTS!

Events listed below are subject to change

AUSMUN is set to hold its 15th annual conference February 25–27 with the theme being “Challenging mindsets, building human capacities.” The conference is an experience that is known for leaving a strong impression on delegates and advisors, and developing a true understanding of international relations and politics. The AUSMUN board strives to ensure that the conference is a memorable experience filled with accomplishments and satisfaction.

Psych Club Event: Psychology Internships  
Q&A with Dr. Chasity O'Connell  
Wednesday, February 2 | 5:00 – 6:00pm

Department Colloquium  
Dr. Alejandro Bonvecchi  
Tuesday, February 15 | 12:00 – 1:00pm

INS Alumni Event Series - TBA

## Contact Us!



INSA - [@insa\\_australia](https://www.instagram.com/insa_australia)  
Psi Chi - [@psichi\\_australia](https://www.instagram.com/psichi_australia)  
AUS Model UN - [@aus\\_modelun](https://www.instagram.com/aus_modelun)  
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