EXPRESSİONS / IMPRESSİONS
DEAR COLLEAGUES,

It is my pleasure to introduce the Spring 2009 issue of Expressions/Impressions, a compilation of personal reflections by members of the Olive Tree Initiative – a group of UC Irvine students who traveled to the Middle East in 2008 to better understand the nature of conflicts in the region. Our students – from Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Druze and unaffiliated backgrounds – raised all funds for the initiative through a grass-roots effort that touched both individuals and community groups who were inspired by their dream.

The students’ perspectives offer a multifaceted view of the Israeli-Palestinian divide and the intricacies of the region’s cultures, religions and politics. Guest edited by Daniel Wehrenfennig, a graduate student in political science, this volume will help anyone who has not made this journey better understand these complex issues. Reading it rekindled memories of my own trip to Israel and the West Bank last year. The vividness of the fears, frustrations, lingering questions, and resilient hope expressed in the student essays resonates meaningfully with me, as I’m sure it will with anyone who has visited the region.

Olive Tree Initiative represents a significant step for our campus, as we continue to encourage constructive, engaged dialogues on difficult topics and endeavor to more fully live our values. It is a call for new approaches to peace building, at home and abroad.

Fiat Lux,

Michael V. Drake, M.D.
Chancellor
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Dear Reader,

The Olive Tree Initiative (OTI) is a grass-roots group which, true to its name, is grounded in various campus student organizations at the University of California, Irvine and nourished by its diversity and commitment to dialogue.

This journal takes an inside look at the Olive Tree Initiative through the voices and thoughts of its members. In the tradition of the UC Irvine Expressions/Impressions publication series, these articles provide a varied perspective. However, our journal is similar and different from the usual volumes. Similar because of the common theme, in this case the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and in particular the student trip to the region to explore these matters first-hand. And yet different because of the focus on the strength of individual expression rather than finessing a logical progression of thought within the journal.

Besides the “From the Journey to the Journey,” which is a description of the initiative, and “Bringing It Home: The Travelers’ Roundtable,” all articles are single-author opinion pieces dealing with the writer’s impressions/expressions during the trip to the region. There were no thematic or expression guidelines set, thus allowing each author his or her full discretion to tell what they wanted and in the form and style they wanted. In this way, each article introduces each author more personally.

Given the heterogeneous composition of the members of the Olive Tree Initiative, the voices and opinions presented in this journal are very different and at times even contradictory. However, all of these different perspectives and opinions come together in the expressed application of dialogue.

The purpose of the Olive Tree Initiative is to encourage dialogue on the key issues surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and provide different forums for discussion. In this vein, our journal is also presented as a dialogue – a printed dialogue. We invite you to join us.

Daniel Wehrenfennig
Guest Editor
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