

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY ABU DHABI

FACULTY

The exceptional place for exceptional people

جامعة نيويورك أبوظبي



NYU ABU DHABI



WELCOME

When NYU Abu Dhabi welcomed its inaugural class in 2010, it was with the vision of establishing a diverse and vital center of distinctive education and scholarship, actively embedded in NYU’s global network and recognized as the model for a new paradigm in higher education: the university as an engine of a more peaceful, cooperative, and productive world.

A decade later, with nearly 1,500 undergraduate students from more than 115 nations, almost 80 Global PhD students in the sciences and engineering, who are closely connected to graduate programs in New York, and more than 300 standing, affiliated, and visiting faculty, that vision has become a reality.

NYU Abu Dhabi is an institution in and of Abu Dhabi, in and of New York University, and in and of the world. It offers the best of the American liberal arts and sciences with the intercultural perspective required for shared understanding and common purpose in our world.

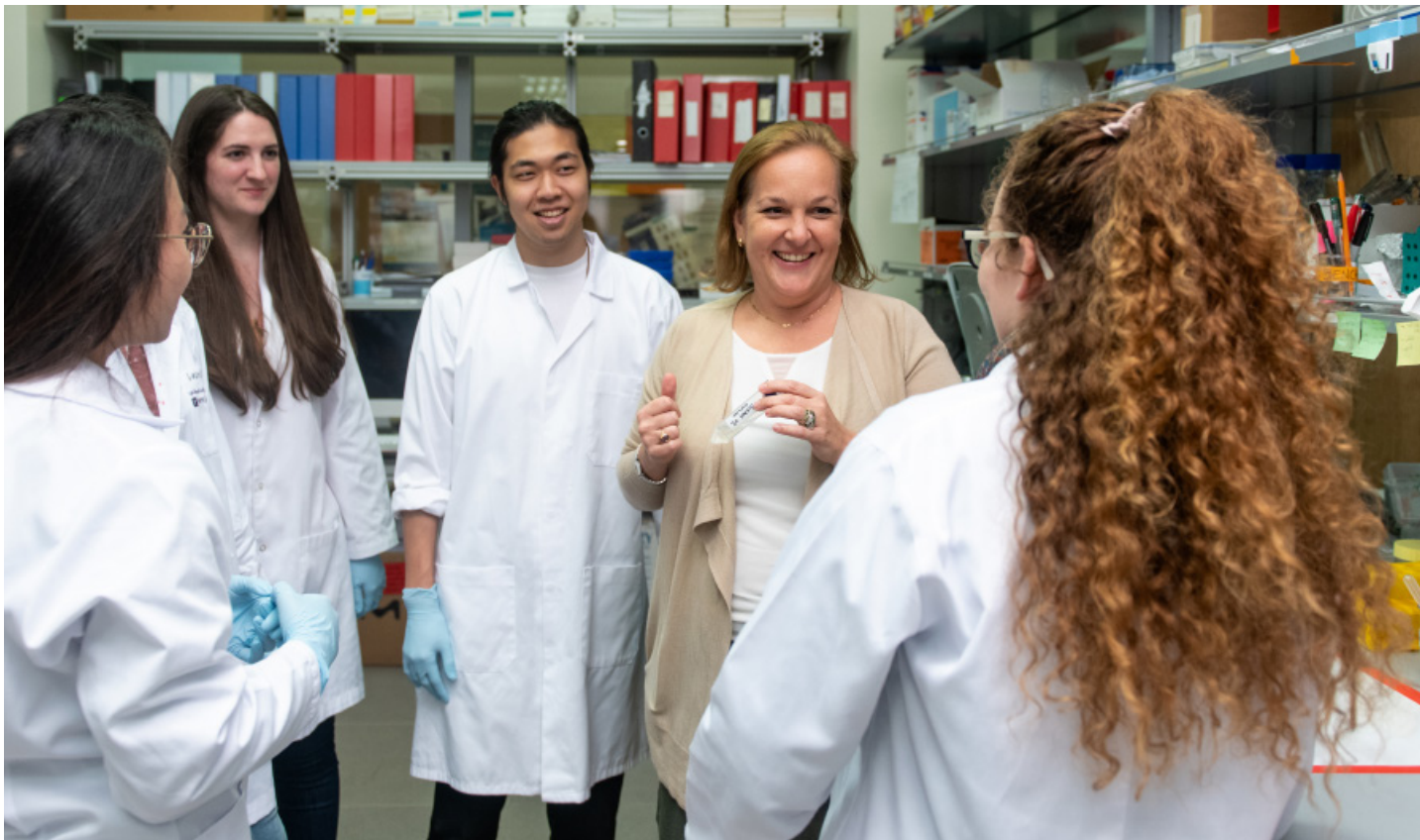
NYU Abu Dhabi research deepens our understanding of the world and ourselves, generates important new knowledge about local history and culture, and facilitates breakthrough discoveries in science and technology.

Its students are drawn from the world’s best. They are bright, intellectually passionate, and committed to building a campus environment anchored in mutual respect, understanding, and care. They are resolved to place their talents at the service of the needs and aspirations of their communities and humanity at large.

NYU Abu Dhabi faculty are leading researchers, scholars, writers, and artists, within and beyond their disciplines. They are dedicated teachers, committed to supporting and challenging their students and engaging them in groundbreaking research.

The undergraduate curriculum builds from a cross-disciplinary core, through 24 rigorous majors, toward a full-year independent Capstone project. Learning, research, and community engagement extend well beyond the classroom into the residences and dining halls, the city of Abu Dhabi and the Emirates, and around the world in NYU’s global sites on six continents.

The NYU Abu Dhabi community is animated by inspiring faculty, students, and staff, working together in a dynamic city at a crossroads of the world. At its heart, NYU Abu Dhabi offers a profound sense of the joy, possibility, and value of education while effectively preparing its students for leadership in a complex world.



AN EQUITABLE ENVIRONMENT

As a leader in her field, Professor **Kirsten Sadler Edepli** was drawn to NYU Abu Dhabi by the opportunities for women — in science, academic leadership, and in society. She's become a champion of diversity and inclusion on campus.

“We cannot be excellent if we are not diverse and inclusive,” declares Professor of Biology Kirsten Sadler Edepli. Since September 2018, she has also been Vice Provost for Faculty Development and Diversity at NYU Abu Dhabi, a role she is relishing alongside running a thriving research group and raising three children.

“To be able to help build things in a way that fits with what an educational institution should look like now, in the 21st century — to make a place that's diverse, with a global perspective, that's completely inclusive — that, to me, is thrilling and inspiring.”

Sadler Edepli was first drawn to the entrepreneurial culture of NYU Abu Dhabi and the resources available for her research. “If I'd stayed where I was, I would have been much more conservative in my approach to science,” she explains.

Since joining NYU Abu Dhabi, she has expanded her research into new areas using state-of-the-art resources and has expanded her career into a leadership position serving the growing NYU Abu Dhabi faculty. Her career started at Mount Holyoke College, followed by a masters and doctoral degree from Harvard University and then a postdoctoral fellowship in the cancer center at MIT with the woman who started the gender equity movement in science, Nancy Hopkins. “Moving is a positive thing in general. It's a way to see things in a new light, to meet new people and to start talking about work in a new way,” she continues. “But there's something about the culture here that's very entrepreneurial and engaged. People aren't interested in taking the conventional approach. Many places strive to be innovative — NYU Abu Dhabi has truly achieved this. To be surrounded by that inspiration and risk taking is great for science and for teaching.”

Over the last 20 years, her research has focused on the liver, and in particular working in a zebrafish model on fatty liver disease and cancer. “I'd been working on alcohol-related liver disease for a while and I started to appreciate that, as in many diseases, even if you have a genetic predisposition or risk factor for that disease, it's not guaranteed you'll get it.”

Due to the funding structure at the University, she's been able to expand her research into new areas. “We've now expanded our work on liver cancer and liver regeneration,” she explains. “I've also been able to shift the focus of my research to look at environmental toxins, which influence disease susceptibility and we've focused on arsenic. Two hundred million people in the world are exposed to unsafe levels of arsenic and that's just what we know about. To understand how this and other exposures are changing the landscape of disease — that is exciting and important. To have the money we need as scientists to push into new fields has been game-changing.”

It's a freedom she wants to share, and when the opportunity came to work on the University's diversity and inclusion mission, she was keen to take it on. “I've been a longstanding advocate for women in science — inspired by Hopkins, my postdoctoral mentor who took on the gender inequity at MIT and then, in the Academy as a whole” she says. “This role is much broader than that, and I realized it was important to think much more strategically about the value of not only our diversity but the inclusive practices at the institution, and why it's critical to excellence in teaching, research, and innovation. My goal is to promote an inclusive environment where all faculty feel like they're valued, can contribute, and can thrive as educators, scholars, and community members.”

Since taking on the role last year she's initiated an institution-wide mentorship

program for early career faculty and an initiative to inspire writing productivity called ‘Eight Weeks of Writing @ NYU Abu Dhabi’ designed to inspire people to focus on their scholarly writing with workshops and groups to provide infrastructure and a sense of community in writing. There's also a new competitive award, which enables faculty members to pursue professional development opportunities at a conference or workshop outside NYU Abu Dhabi to broaden their professional network and to get industry-standard perspectives on their work. There is a Women Faculty Writing Group, a series of leadership development programs, and many initiatives done in collaboration with the University-wide Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee. “We have a very unique population that's already very diverse,” she explains. “Usually a role like this would focus on getting underrepresented groups in the door, but the next step, and the critical one, is inclusion. That means including diverse voices in research projects, in the classroom, in administration, and in any and every area we engage with the community. My work is to make sure we're operating according to these institutional values.”

And what about where she started, with equality and representation for women? “The most common misconception I come across about Abu Dhabi as a whole is that women can't succeed here. That's simply not true,” she states. “This is a very supportive place for women. The country's leadership has been proactive in seeing that women are an essential part of the economy and of society.”

She gets frustrated at myths that women can't drive or work, and the idea that it's not safe. “I have three of my kids here with me. They love it. It's very family friendly, very safe and a great place to raise a family.” Though she confesses she wasn't certain what to expect on first

arriving. “I didn't appreciate before I came here what an amazing quality of life we have in the UAE. It's something every prospective faculty should think about — it's about having time for family, for reflection, about time to relax — life here is fast-paced and work can be demanding. An afternoon at the Louvre Abu Dhabi or sharing a beachside breakfast on the weekend with friends is a wonderful way to recharge. The opportunities to travel in the region are also exciting — we all have the travel bug and compare notes and share photos from our travels all the time.”

“To make a place that's diverse, which has a global perspective, that's completely inclusive — that to me is so exciting.”

With all the advantages of living in Abu Dhabi, overall it's the opportunities within the University for teaching brilliant students, carrying out cutting edge research, and the inclusive environment she's shouting about. “Anyone coming into the faculty has the opportunity to input. Come with an open mind — as an institution we've gone back to the drawing board to think ‘If we want to build a top tier, world-class higher-education institution, what would that look like?’ And we're doing it! We've been intentional about how we want to be global, diverse and innovative, and we realize to be a leading university, diversity is a must. When will you ever get a chance to be part of something like that again?”

KNOWLEDGE WITHOUT LIMITS

*Taking an innovative and integrated approach to research is the key to NYU Abu Dhabi's growth and groundbreaking work. **Sehamuddin Galadari**, professor of biology, senior vice provost of research, and managing director of the University's Research Institute, explains how it makes the University unique.*

“I see NYU Abu Dhabi as a beacon of a new higher education model offering an alternative system for the world.” It’s a bold statement by Sehamuddin Galadari, professor of biology, senior vice provost of research, and managing director of the University’s Research Institute. But no one could accuse him of overstatement. Research at NYU Abu Dhabi is different.

“First, we operate in the liberal arts education system,” he explains. “We value breadth in the educational experience, and believe that the more integrated the curriculum is, the better a person will be as an individual and as a citizen of the world. Secondly, while we have four academic divisions — Science, Arts and Humanities, Engineering, and Social Science — everything is integrated and not compartmentalized. I, as a biochemist, for example, can collaborate freely with an engineer, because we’re part of the same research building. Our labs and offices are proximal and this gives rise to interaction amongst faculty from different divisions and disciplines.”

Galadari believes this is unique for a higher education institution. The University has more than 80 faculty labs and projects, which are set up in collaborative groups. “I don’t have my lab in isolation,” he says. “I’m part of a group of labs, and lab members flow between them, using each other’s equipment, and accessing shared resources, which are made available for everybody, not only our division of science, but also to collaborators from other divisions.”

This cross-pollination of ideas is also facilitated through 12 state-of-the-art Core Technology Platforms (CTPs), equipped for deep science research such as brain imaging, nuclear magnetic resonance, and spectroscopy, and analytical and materials characterization, among others. Centrally funded and managed, the technicians running the CTPs often hold PhDs of their own, and for 20 percent of their time conduct their own research. “It’s advantageous,” says Galadari because “they won’t only run a sample for me, they’ll engage

and advise on how I could do an experiment differently. This bidirectional interaction means we actually discuss and work with our science.” Of course it’s not just about science for Galadari. As Managing Director of the Research Institute, he’s responsible for ensuring the multidisciplinary centers are in line with NYU Abu Dhabi’s vision to be one of the world’s great research universities addressing complex challenges of global significance.

These challenges have been grouped into themes to be explored: bio-innovation and health, cities, culture and heritage, environmental sustainability, governance and peace. The research centers exist as interdisciplinary hubs tackling different perspectives on these themes, from Arabic literature and cyber security, to interacting urban networks and global sea level change. “These centers are investigators and multidisciplinary, addressing fundamental questions of a global nature,” he says. “And we are having a local impact too.” The Public Health Research Center, for example, is doing groundbreaking work on better understanding diabetes and cardiovascular disease risk factors in Arab populations, a group very under represented in public health and genetics research up to this point.

“NYU Abu Dhabi’s connection with NYU New York, as part of our global university, brings connection and collaboration with partners within our NYU network and also all over the world” Galadari says. “We have collaborators at Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Yale, Toronto, Shanghai and so it goes on.”

He continues: “To have access to these collaborative labs, to be acknowledged globally, and to have the connection with people presenting at conferences and visiting us here in Abu Dhabi — these opportunities really enhance this environment to facilitate innovation, creativity, and scientific discovery. As a researcher, NYU Abu Dhabi is a beautiful place to be. Both for us and for our students, who will become our future colleagues.”

*As director of NYU Abu Dhabi's Design-for-Excellence Lab, **Ozgur Sinanoglu** is at the cutting edge of cyber-security research. When he joined the University in 2010, his research focused on electronics, specifically how to avoid manufacturing defects on chips to make them more reliable. But access to the very best facilities gave Sinanoglu the opportunity for his research to take a twist.*

“AN INFRASTRUCTURE AND MINDSET TO BOOST RESEARCH.”

“I joined NYU Abu Dhabi because I saw it as an opportunity to grow professionally and boost my research program,” Ozgur Sinanoglu recalls. “I knew this would be the right place to extend my research as this University had the right infrastructure and mindset. I had access to the very best facilities, I was able to put together a fantastic team, and could hire professional chip designers for my lab. With this group of people, we were able to develop ideas, and turn them into prototypes. My whole research problem changed to look at how people try to make chips fail or do malicious things, and how to prevent that. It became much more fun and interesting.”

With his team, Sinanoglu researches the security of chips — something vital to both governments and businesses trying to prevent loss of intellectual property. “Our research is about finding ways to design chips so that you can hide some of the critical structural information about the chip from third-party chip manufacturers, while enabling the fabrication of chips. We call this hardware design obfuscation.”

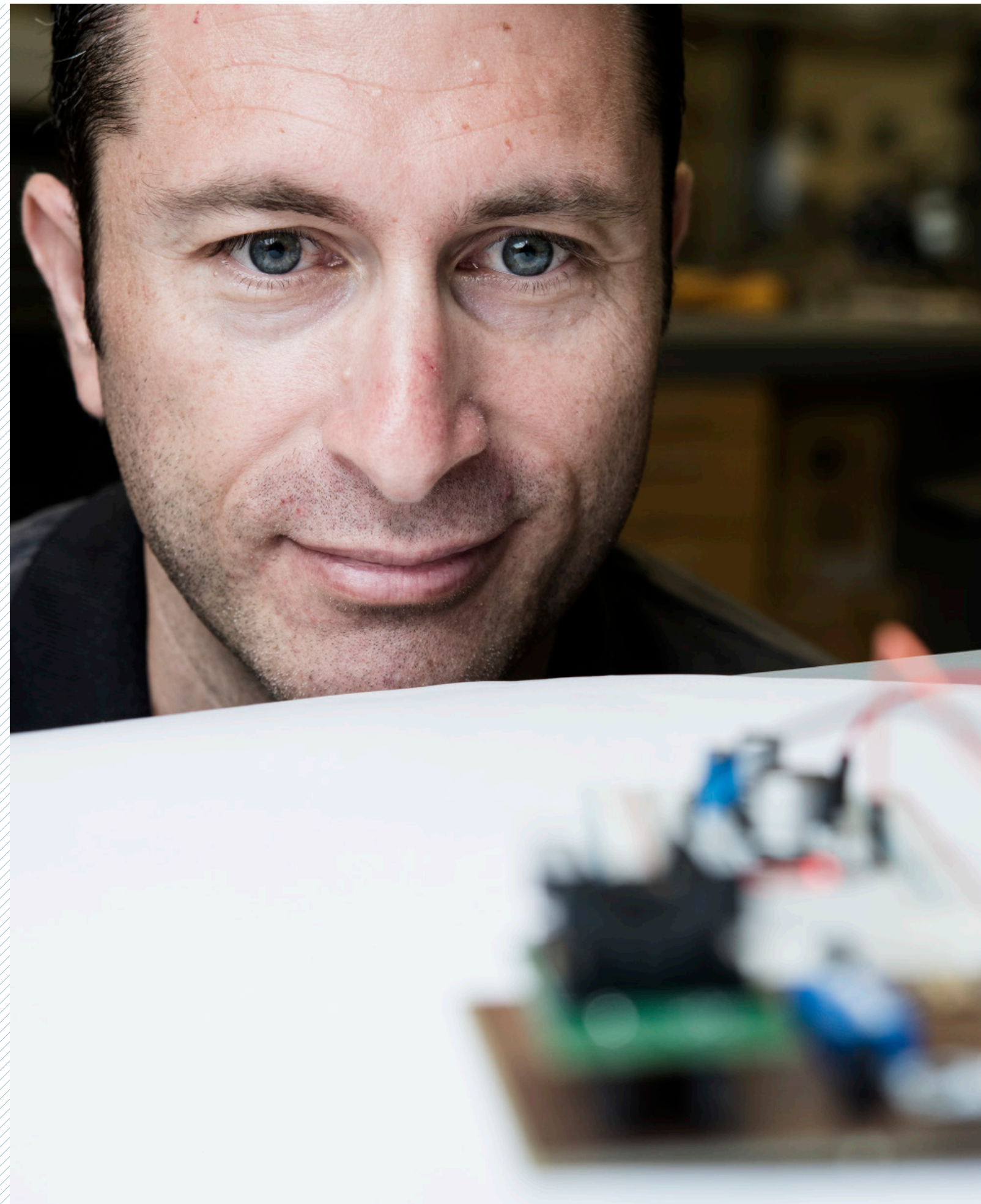
At a hardware level this means his team add circuitry to a chip that expects a secret key. Someone trusted with the secret key can activate the chip to restore its functionality, but at the time of fabrication, the secret key is missing. “We call the chip we created the logic-locked chip. It’s our biggest breakthrough to date,” he says. “It’s the first of its kind.”

They made the chip open source and challenged the entire research community to retrieve its secret key. “Two years on, it’s still not been broken,” he smiles.

The Design-for-Excellence Lab is part of the Center for Cyber Security — Sinanoglu is currently the lead principal investigator of this center as well — a place he describes as a multidisciplinary, and interdisciplinary center including faculty from engineering, sciences, and social sciences.

“Sometimes there are problems that need to be looked at from different angles, with different perspectives requiring expertise from multiple faculties,” he explains. “It can help certain projects if there’s collaboration between multiple labs.”

Sinanoglu believes it would have been difficult to achieve what he and his team have elsewhere. “I was able to get my ideas patented. I was able to apply and get prestigious funding from places like the US Department of Defense, National Science Foundation, and Intel. I was able to put together a research team that could not only produce great publications, but also create chip prototypes. From a professional point of view, and from my research point of view, what else could you ask for?”



“It’s not just the place where I work; it’s a place that I’ve been able to help build.”

Nathalie Peutz is associate professor of Arab Crossroads Studies at NYU Abu Dhabi, having joined the University in 2010. She shares her experience.

What led you to NYU Abu Dhabi?

My husband and I both had tenure track positions in the United States, but were working quite far away from one another. A friend told us about the establishment of NYU Abu Dhabi, and we were interested because NYU Abu Dhabi was hiring faculty in our respective fields and because we both work in the Middle East. My husband is an intellectual historian of the pre-modern Middle East, and I was working on environmental conservation and development in Yemen. But we soon became even more interested in the NYU Abu Dhabi project itself.

What was it about NYU Abu Dhabi that captured your imagination?

What excited us was the active nature of the academic start-up, and what it was trying to achieve in terms of developing a global, liberal arts education for the 21st century. I also love the challenge that comes with teaching such diverse and motivated students. I often teach 15-person seminars in which each student is from a different country. This means that we can’t always rely on shared points of reference and that I learn from my students’ various backgrounds and points of view.

How is it beneficial to your work to be based in Abu Dhabi?

I work in the Middle East — my current research focuses on forced migration and displacement in Yemen and the Horn of Africa, with most of my fieldwork being conducted in Djibouti. So, it’s helpful for me to be based in the region. But I’ve seen that even faculty who work elsewhere benefit. That’s because being in Abu Dhabi brings plenty of opportunities, not just for research in the Middle East, but also in Asia and East Africa, because they’re so close. It facilitates research and collaboration, particularly collaboration with scholars and universities located outside of the Global North. So we’re not just focused on what’s happening in North America and Europe, and this enhances our research.

What impact does your research have on your teaching?

Twice now, I’ve taken students in my course called Migration and Displacement Across the Red Sea to a Yemeni refugee camp in Djibouti. This regional seminar enabled students to experience the architecture and governance of this particular camp while reading literature on refugees and forced migration. For example, my students read about the development of the UNHCR’s three “durable solutions” for refugees while, in the same day, hearing Yemeni refugees criticize these very pathways. Another afternoon, it was one of the Yemeni men who led the seminar discussion on the organization of camp life. In these moments, it was the refugees, not me, who were educating the students. And it was the refugees

who encouraged them to rethink their conceptions of economic and political migrants. These visits also deepened my own connection with my interlocutors, because instead of just seeing me as a visiting researcher who asks them questions, they saw me as a teacher, and that helped give them a perspective on where I was coming from.

How do you balance your research with teaching?

It helps that we have generous research funding. In the past year alone, I’ve been able to travel three times to my fieldsite in Djibouti and twice on a research trip to Korea, and this has been while I’ve been teaching. Anthropologists are always trying to get into the field but usually have to wait for summers or sabbaticals to have the time and funding to carry out fieldwork. We also have a relatively light teaching load here, which has allowed me to do quite a bit of research during the academic year as well.

What excites you most about NYU Abu Dhabi?

When working at a growing institution, you’re able to think about how to develop programs and the curriculum without simply continuing with the pre-existing approach. What has surprised me is just how dynamic these conversations continue to be. The faculty is committed to institution building, and to thinking about new ways of teaching, new forms of collaboration, and new ways of trying to structure programs. NYU Abu Dhabi isn’t just the place I work; it’s a place I’ve been able to help build.

Monica
Menendez

Engineering



Associate Professor of Civil and Urban Engineering
Monica Menendez focuses on multimodal transportation networks. She is also leading CITIES, a new interdisciplinary Research Center dedicated to advancing urban science and promoting cutting-edge research in urban networks. She talks about the impact that working with expert faculty across disciplines is having on her work.

It takes imagination to solve problems and come up with creative solutions. Whether around sustainability or humanitarian goals, the creation of technology in the face of environmental and energy constraints, factoring in the complexity of societal needs requires imagination. This is engineering at NYU Abu Dhabi.

With design and innovation integrated into every part of the curriculum, and a global perspective and breadth of disciplines included in our research; whether local or global, micro or macro, engineers at NYU Abu Dhabi are coming up with creative, disruptive, distinctive, and imaginative ways to address the challenges of our world.

I first came to NYU Abu Dhabi in 2016 for a symposium, and from the moment I arrived I loved the environment. People from across each of the four divisions work together and that promotes research in a way that is unheard of in many other places. Thus, two years later, I was very excited about the opportunity to actually become part of the faculty at this University. Both me and my husband are engineers and we've both found it's the perfect place for us to do our individual research.

My particular focus is on mobility, an intrinsic component of cities. The things I'm looking at have a global significance, but being here in the Middle East also brings a great opportunity to explore potential solutions for this region. There's the chance to think about how transportation networks could be created from scratch and how they can evolve over time. If you look at Abu Dhabi and other cities in the Emirates they're fairly new, growing and changing at a relatively fast pace. To work with and create alternatives for the city you're based in means you really have the chance to make a difference. Coming from Europe, where cities are long established and most of the changes are marginal, Abu Dhabi offers the opportunity to really change the future.

Because of the highly interdisciplinary way the CITIES center is set up, I get to talk to economists about the effects of transportation on an economic level, and to sociologists about the impacts of mobility on a societal level; I can have conversations like these and others because I get to see connections between my work and other professors' expertise that I wouldn't have seen otherwise.

There are no barriers across disciplines within the NYU Abu Dhabi Engineering Division, and that means often you're sitting next to a person working on something completely different to you. We have amazing brainstorming sessions and there's incredible potential for collaboration. The whole point of the CITIES center is to do the same but beyond the Engineering Division: we are trying to capture and understand the many interdependencies that are sometimes very visible but sometimes also hidden within the life of a city. My specific work is related to mobility, but CITIES is much more than that. We are bringing diverse conversations into one place to have holistic discussions about urban networks.

“I'm able to bring something to the table I couldn't before.”

For me, NYU Abu Dhabi has proved to be a very collegial environment. It's research focused but also has a strong emphasis on excellent teaching and education. This is good because you can make sure that the few courses you have, you can deliver to a high quality. And the students are of the highest caliber so it's easy to do so.

Most of all, it's good to be in a region that values innovation and in an academic environment that supports it. There's a lot of respect for the research I'm doing and for the time and effort it takes. I'm now looking at mobility with many different questions, and leading CITIES is giving me a more holistic view of urban challenges. I'm able to bring something to the table I couldn't bring before and that's broadening my research.

Alan
HealyScience

*By joining NYU Abu Dhabi in January 2019, Assistant Professor of Chemistry **Alan Healy** has found a place for ambitious research with the potential to transform global human health.*

Contemporary scientific research requires conversation and collaboration. That's why NYU Abu Dhabi encourages research and teaching from an interdisciplinary standpoint. We believe integrated research is needed to address some of the most pressing issues affecting the planet, and to further our understanding of the world.

With state-of-the-art research facilities and Core Technology Platforms, the University has attracted leading scientists to do cutting-edge research here — whether it be drug discovery, genomics, or environmental sustainability. Scientifically and geographically, NYU Abu Dhabi is ideally positioned to share world-changing scholarships, and broaden the conversations of discovery beyond borders of nations and disciplines.



I decided to join NYU Abu Dhabi because I was looking for an institution that was excited by and supportive of ambitious research programs. My research group studies natural products — small molecules produced by natural sources such as bacteria, fungi, and plants. Natural products have proven to be incredibly important for human health; they provide around 60 percent of all approved therapeutics. What's more, there's a growing understanding that the natural products produced by the estimated 30 trillion bacteria or more that reside in and on the human body play a tremendous role in human health. Already, for example, they've been linked to the development of a range of diseases including cancer, neurological disorders, and obesity.

Before joining NYU Abu Dhabi I was working as part of a multidisciplinary team at Yale University, studying the link between a small molecule toxin produced by select strains of bacteria in the human gut and the development of colorectal cancer. We discovered that the toxin damages the DNA of the epithelial cells lining the colon. This discovery will enable the development of more advanced diagnostic tests and targeted therapeutics for colorectal cancer. It was a very successful research program, but it required a team of researchers and significant resources just to study one molecule, albeit a very biologically relevant one. This highlighted to me that the outstanding challenge in this area is actually the development of an efficient platform to not only study one natural product, but tens or even hundreds.

There have been exponential advances in genome sequencing technology, which have enabled researchers to rapidly sequence the DNA of microbes directly from the environment. This has revealed that we've only studied a fraction of the microbial ecosystem. It's estimated we've isolated less than 10 percent of natural products produced by the chemical factories encoded in the genomes of this vast microbial community. It's a very exciting time in this area of research. If we can develop a method to access this reservoir of untapped natural products, we could discover a treasure trove of bioactive molecules which could be repurposed as novel therapeutics. On top of that, we'll gain a better understanding of how microbes use these molecules to interact with their environment, in particular the human body.

It's an ambitious and challenging project. To make progress, we need to harness the latest technological advances in genome sequencing, bioinformatics, synthetic automation, and high throughput screening. Fortunately NYU Abu Dhabi has the vision and willingness to support and invest in big ideas like these, and that was a major factor in why I chose to come here. We have excellent core technology facilities, supported by a talented group of researchers who collaborate with us to drive our research forward.

“NYU Abu Dhabi has the vision and willingness to support and invest in big ideas.”

The University is full of very talented and motivated people who have all made an active decision to be here. Because we're not siloed, in the Science Division and across the institution as a whole, I get the opportunity to interact every day with colleagues from different disciplines. It's very rewarding. Chemical biology and drug discovery is a big focus within the NYU global network. It's exciting to be part of a network of faculty all working toward a common goal of improving human health, and to be tackling it in innovative and exciting ways.

Hannah
Brückner

Social Science

Professor and Program Head of Social Research and Public Policy **Hannah Brückner** joined NYU Abu Dhabi in 2011, drawn to the combination of teaching excellence and support for her research. She explains how the University has shaped her work, and how she in turn has been able to shape the University.



I already knew NYU Abu Dhabi's founding Dean of Science, Iván Szelényi, who joined the University in its first year. I ran into him that year and asked him how it was going, and as we got talking he asked me if, since I had a sabbatical coming up, I'd be interested in spending some time here. I joined at the start of the 2011 academic year as a visitor, and got involved in the Social Science curriculum and the intellectual projects in the division as well as mentoring individual students and, honestly, I fell in love.

I realized there was room here for me to grow and to take on more responsibility, so I took a permanent role, and I haven't looked back. My students here are fantastic. They come not just to learn, but to change the world for the better; they're not here to become rich, but to enrich the world. They're so smart and hardworking and I find their goals worth supporting.

In helping to build the Social Science Division I've learned a lot from other faculty. We have a very interdisciplinary culture. As a social scientist I observe something in the world and try to explain it from my disciplinary viewpoint; different disciplines might have different answers to the same observation, and being able to juxtapose these diverse ways of looking at the world is ultimately a more satisfying and comprehensive way to work.

For example, right now I'm working on a paper that looks at the consequences of out-migration of men from Kerala in India to the Gulf. I'm trying to understand the impact of that on the social situation of women in Kerala. I've been able to discuss my work with one of my colleagues in economics who knows the literature on labor migration well, and these conversations have helped me conceptualize this paper, and to plan the statistical analysis in a way that's robust and meaningful.



I learn a lot from hanging out with economists. I've broadened my mind in lots of different directions since coming here, from talking with economists, and with anthropologists and colleagues who work in literature. Their perspectives and the literature they know gives me the opportunity to think more deeply about the issues I'm researching.

This particular piece of research also came about in part because I'm in Abu Dhabi — 85 percent or more of the people here are migrants, including me. It made me think about the sending societies and what that means for those places. In one of the districts of Kerala where I do my fieldwork a third of all households have a migrant worker, and almost all of those have come to the Gulf. There's lots to discover and for a social scientist like me, being here is perfect.

“Being able to juxtapose diverse ways of looking at the world is a more satisfying way to work.”

The University's support for research is really wonderful. It was such a pleasant surprise to realize how much the University cares for us — they provide the resources we need for our work, and if you ask for something you need to proceed, they work hard to make it happen.

What's unique about NYU Abu Dhabi is its combination of a research university with a liberal arts college. We care about students, we care about teaching, we have a curriculum we constantly develop and improve, and at the same time, we have research infrastructure and ambitions that you don't find in many other places in the world. These things are our *raison d'être*.

Salwa
Mikdadi

and Humanities



Associate Professor of the Practice of Art History **Salwa Mikdadi** joined NYU Abu Dhabi in 2013. She explains how being in a multi-cultural environment has enriched her practice.

The human experience is rich ground for exploration. Wherever there are people, there's creative culture-making. Whether it is inquiring into fundamental questions of human thought, cultural values, modes of expression, or developing new creative capacities, the Arts and Humanities at NYU Abu Dhabi spans disciplines to encompass the range of human diversity both in the past and the present.

While firmly rooted in the finest traditions of a liberal arts education, the division brings a new intellectual perspective, committed to global frameworks of understanding, and an expansive approach where history, theory, and practice are considered together, rather than separately. The goal? To know and comprehend more deeply and fully what it is to be human in the world.

I was already working in Abu Dhabi when the University was established, as Executive Director of the Arts and Culture Program at the Emirates Foundation. In that role I had the opportunity to learn first-hand about local artists, filmmakers, and writers, and helping administer the International Prize for Arabic Fiction, often nicknamed the Arabic Booker. In 2013, I started teaching as an adjunct professor in the already established Visual Arts Program, and in 2014 I began teaching full-time. And I'm very glad I did.

Offering a liberal arts education means the University is constantly considering the myriad global challenges humanity faces. This is particularly important in the arts, because in many ways they're inherently cross-disciplinary and a force for positive change in society. The student body here is incredibly diverse, which makes it a very exciting place to work — I always ask students to share examples of artwork from their country, and then we compare. It's amazing what they come up with, and how art brings us closer together in an open engagement with global issues and at the same time links us with the local community.

I've spent all of my working life researching and educating people about art from the Arab world, for a long time in the US, and now in the region itself. I was one of the first to specialize in this field. Currently I'm looking at why women artists, who in some Arab countries were the first to create abstract art in the mid 20th century, were not acknowledged at the time, locally or internationally. I can't claim to have discovered these artists, but I have brought them to the attention of the world. There was a time when there was no awareness of modern and contemporary art of the Arab world. Now there is unprecedented interest and the support I receive, as faculty for my research, advances new knowledge in the field and enriches class discussion.

Being here is a tremendous opportunity, and one I wasn't fully aware of at the beginning. In the last 10 years, I have witnessed the burgeoning of the arts scene, and today the UAE is considered the region's center for the arts. The Louvre Abu Dhabi is minutes away, and access to the top-rated Sharjah Biennial and Dubai's galleries, as well as future plans for several art museums, including the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, offer many possibilities. We invite curators and artists to meet our students and plan internships for our students at art institutions. I've had several opportunities to curate art exhibitions on and off campus and have led my students in curating their own exhibition from a private art collection. Likewise, the University's own commitment to the arts, hosting conferences and holding exhibitions in the University's art gallery has been great both for me and for students who are able to see works in person while also meeting the artists.

“I never cease to be amazed by the mix of cultures on campus and in Abu Dhabi and how exciting this can be for the arts.”

On campus, I co-curated an exhibition called *Permanent Temporariness* for the University. It was a mid-career retrospective for artistic duo Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti, looking at refugees and others who aren't settled where they live, including here in Abu Dhabi. The exhibition blended art and architecture, and it was wonderful for students to meet the artists, as well as for us to collaborate with colleagues in anthropology and other disciplines on symposia and workshops around the theme. As part of the exhibition, we constructed a refugee tent made from canvas clad with concrete, which still stands on the periphery of the campus. It's now a space students and faculty use for theater, poetry reading, and other classes.

While my focus is on this part of the world, and its contemporary art, at the same time, I'm seeing examples from across the globe — artists from Korea responding to the Arab Spring, for example — and the mission of this institution supports this crossing of ideas. I never cease to be amazed by the mix of cultures on campus and in Abu Dhabi and how exciting this can be for the arts.

*Post-graduate research fellow and NYU Abu Dhabi alumni **Tamara Gjorgjieva** started out as a chemistry major undergraduate, and has found an ongoing path with NYU Abu Dhabi through genetics and the University's extracurricular programs. She shares her story.*



I'm originally from Macedonia, where I went to a public high school and did the International Baccalaureate. I was really thinking about the types of universities I wanted to apply to and was keen to study abroad. Someone came to talk to us about NYU Abu Dhabi, and it was the one school where there didn't need to be a single trade off, it seemed like it had it all: a liberal arts education, a global and diverse student body, the idea of learning outside of the classroom, plus financial aid. I felt that this kind of education was going to set me up for the rest of my life.

I started out as a chemistry major. Every life science major has to study the foundations of science so through the first three semesters I also studied physics and biology. These courses opened my eyes to interdisciplinary science, and I realized I just needed to decide which discipline I saw myself approaching science through. I switched to become a biology major. We had built a genotyping project of people on campus and I fell in love with genetics — it bridged together everything that had captured my interest up to that point.

I graduated in May 2019 and stayed for two months over the summer on a post-graduate practical training program as a research assistant. It's given me the opportunity to work on a continuation of my final year Capstone research project and to get a paper written, and hopefully published.

I was also heavily involved with student affairs. I was part of Student Government for two and a half years, and I was president in my senior year. I was also a competitive debater and represented NYU Abu Dhabi at a lot of international tournaments. I think exposure to such a broad range of extracurricular activities really showed me the world beyond my science degree.

As a person who never considered anything beyond science, it really showed me how my skill-set goes beyond the sciences. I realized that, while I'm very interested in science, I'm far more passionate about the ethical and consequential legal questions that surround genetic technology more than I am in being the researcher who'll put those technologies in place.

I've returned to NYU Abu Dhabi as a post-graduate research fellow. The fellowship is given to eight graduating seniors for independent research projects under faculty mentorship. My fellowship sits between the biology and legal studies programs — at one end I'll be working on the UAE Healthy Future study, the first prospective cohort study to determine genetic risk factors for prevalent disease in the Emirati population. At the other end, I will be studying bioethics and UAE law. Specifically, I will be looking at how to translate genetic regulations from secular societies — such as the US and Western Europe — into an Islamic context of bioethics. My goal is to generate a legislative proposal for regulating genetic practices in the UAE in the future.

Coming here has proved to be the opportunity of a lifetime. I'm biased of course, but I don't think anywhere else could have offered me this kind of multidisciplinary, holistic, and exciting education.



“I don't think anywhere else could have offered me this kind of multidisciplinary, holistic, and exciting education.”

FIRST CHOICE

Nizar Habash is associate professor of Computer Science, director of the Computational Approaches to Modeling Language (CAMEL) Lab, and head of the Computer Science program.



Where are you from?

I'm Palestinian originally, but as for many Palestinians today, I didn't grow up in Palestine. I was born in Baghdad, in Iraq, I've lived in Lebanon, Syria, and Tunisia, and was a Jordanian citizen. At 18, I went to the US to study; and, after living there for some 22 years, I became an American citizen. All my adult life has been in an American context, but I grew up in the Arab world. Before I came to NYU Abu Dhabi, I was at Columbia University in New York.

Tell us about your work.

In my area as a computer scientist, I work on artificial intelligence, specifically language — for example, how to get a chatbot to work, or how to get the computer to understand the meaning of the words you say. My PhD was in machine translation, and now I'm focused on Arabic language processing. In my lab we work on every aspect of the language from disambiguation to identifying a language's morphology and syntax, as well as projects on chatbots and on addressing gender bias in machine translation.

What drew you to the university?

After my PhD, I came to focus on Arabic and Arabic dialects, and I wanted to develop artificial intelligence tools for Arabic. When I saw the adverts for NYU Abu Dhabi I fell in love with the idea of the place. The combination of a liberal arts model targeting students from all over the world, and the emphasis on research, makes NYU Abu Dhabi a fantastic place for my research and teaching interests.

What do you teach?

I teach in my specialty, of course, but my general Core course is called Words. I get to talk about language from the perspective of many different fields (linguistics, computer science, political science, and visual art), and the course project is to create new constructed languages. So far my students have created 14 over three years. It's such a fun experience, particularly here where you have students from every linguistic background you can imagine. During my interview, the dean at the time asked me, "Do you think of yourself as a linguist or a computer scientist?" — my undergraduate education involved one degree in linguistics, and another in computer engineering, and my PhD was in computer science in natural language processing and computational linguistics. It was a question that made me both nervous and excited, because although my specialty is in their intersection, they can be quite different fields, and I did not know where he was going with the question. When the dean then told me about the idea of the Core courses, and teaching across disciplines, I was so excited I wanted to jump up and down. When I describe my Core course to people, I pinch myself. I can't believe I get paid for this. It's what I love.

How's life on campus?

It's very intellectually stimulating being here, but, while it might sound like a boring old professor thing to say, having lived in New York, it's also lovely and quiet! I live on campus, so my commute from home to my office is about three minutes.

What's your experience of Abu Dhabi as a city?

I love the weather. In winter it's just amazing, but now I also actually like summers. I'll go for what I call a 'sauna walk' in the summer evenings and come home to a cold shower. It's brilliant. Plus walking at night, anywhere, is never an issue. My experience of the country is that it's a place that respects your privacy and I feel incredibly secure living here. There's wonderful food in the city, not just in terms of restaurants but even in the supermarkets, where there's incredible choice — you can get ingredients to cook Arabic food, Japanese food, Thai food, whatever you like. I never feel like I miss anything compared with living in the US. In fact there are more choices readily accessible here in comparison to the US. Which is another thing — Abu Dhabi is a true center of the world. I've always traveled but from here it's so much easier — I've been to Japan, Italy, Greece, France, Ireland, and even Kazakhstan — all direct flights from Abu Dhabi! Also because it's a research university, we get a lot of support for travel for research and for publishing our work.

Would you say NYU Abu Dhabi is home?

I've been here five years now, and I'm looking forward to another 10 or 15 years. This has become home. Choosing to come here was the best decision I made. I'm still absolutely convinced — it was exactly the right choice.

ALUMNI

Simon Wilkes came to NYU Abu Dhabi from Trinidad and Tobago as a Political Science major and switched to Theater. He graduated in 2019 and shares his experience as a student.

I applied to Harvard, Trinity College, and Columbia. And then NYU Abu Dhabi — I thought why not? It seemed strange at first that NYU had a campus there, but the more I found out about it, the more I knew I had to apply. I was blown away by the kinds of people they were attracting to study there. When I got through to the interview, I realized this was a different kind of school, because I got an email saying, ‘You’ve been selected for interview. Please let us know your passport information, because we’d like to fly you out.’ I couldn’t believe it.

When I arrived I was very impressed with the students I was interacting with. For the two days I was there, I don’t think I went to bed before three or four in the morning, because I was up talking and sharing ideas. I remember going back home after and thinking, “I have to get to Abu Dhabi.” These were the kinds of people I wanted to be in class with. I was lucky enough to make it. I started out studying political science. As part of the Core Curriculum I picked a course in Arabic, and one in political science and then randomly I chose an arts class, taught by Ruben Polendo (now Chairperson at NYU Tisch School of the Arts). He set me on the path of becoming a Theater major, because I was given a view of art and theater I’d never been exposed to before.



I appreciated the breadth — yes, I studied Theater. But studying at NYU Abu Dhabi was about learning how to analyze, process, problem solve, and gain a rigorous skill set. What’s nice is you don’t get locked into one way of doing things, and there’s flexibility to be able to shift, adapt, and adjust to take into account different ways of doing things.

“If you’re driven enough to really own your education, the opportunities here are incredible.”

I felt fortunate to be taught by such outstanding people from faculty, both in and outside the Theater program. Across the board, I felt they were putting students first. The teaching isn’t of the ‘raising a hand in the back of a lecture hall kind’; you get to talk and interact with all these different people on campus. You see everybody all the time. And similar to that first interview weekend I had, one of the best parts of my student experience was the long conversations with people in the dining hall after lunch, and the level of debate. Faculty made me feel like I was developing. You could walk around the Arts Center and see faculty in there all the time, and they had a different, welcoming attitude. They wanted to be accessible to students.

Another advantage was the experiences available to us, to help you take that extra step on, whether it was an internship at the fitness center, or volunteering on a program that had nothing to do with my course of study just because it looked interesting, or going to an Institute talk with a renowned academic in their field. Within the program, the faculty themselves were knowledgeable across a broad range. The head of the Theater program was my advisor, but she’s also a theater director, she has a company that does live performance in sign language called “sound paintings,” she acts, and she used to do set design. It means when you get feedback it can be specific, but you can also zoom out to see the different moving parts. Bringing all these perspectives and skills together promotes that flexibility of thinking. When would you ever get the chance to have something like that again? If you’re driven enough to really own your education, the opportunities here are incredible.



A day in the life: Stéphane Boissinot, professor and program head of biology

My day always starts with coffee. It's the most important part of my day — not just for the caffeine fix, but for the conversation. I go to my lab, find my postdocs and talk to them. I'm constantly talking to my colleagues, students, and the people I work with. People might say they see too much of me! But I find these conversations in the morning are possibly the most productive time of my day.



We talk together about what they've been doing, what they're working on today, or papers that they've read. I don't need to create timetabled 'drop-in' sessions for my postdocs because we're always talking about their science.

Next I go through my emails. As program head of Biology, I have to answer lots of questions, make decisions and plan ahead — not just for the program, but also for my classes. I love teaching at NYU Abu Dhabi and I very much enjoy the interdisciplinary nature of our courses. For example, as part of the Core Curriculum I teach a course called The

Human Body, where I get to incorporate perspectives from the arts, literature, sociology, evolutionary biology, and physiology. I describe it as Renaissance-style learning, where students approach a question from multiple angles and explore the knowledge that can be gained from different disciplines. I love it and it's great here because we have small classes and very good students who come prepared having done the reading and with insightful questions. It's a huge pleasure to teach.

When I've finished teaching in the afternoon, I'll spend the rest of the day writing, editing, and working in the labs in the Experimental Research Building where I'm based. As an evolutionary biologist, one half of my research focuses on the evolution of the structure and the size of the genome, and the other half on adaptation to the environment, specifically to altitude.

NYU Abu Dhabi is a very tight community, and being so close is good for our science and our scholarship. We're a small institution with a very diverse faculty, so I find myself talking to people outside of my field on a daily basis. Right now, I'm collaborating with developmental biologists and cell biologists, and there's potential in the future for broader work with chemists and engineers. These collaborations, together with the freedom to engage in research programs that might fail, is fantastic and the University is probably unique in these ways.

I work in bursts of half an hour, then I take a 15 minute break, then I'll do another half hour and so on. It means I'm constantly collaborating with people

in the faculty and talking about the different projects I'm working on. It's very dynamic — some people prefer to sit still for five hours straight, but I'm not one of those. I don't like to be alone too much. This is how I get most of my work done.

I like to pack in as much as I can while I'm in Abu Dhabi. It's a great place for outdoor leisure. I love desert camping and lots of people working in my lab love it too. Recently we've started field work on adaptation to desert life — Abu Dhabi is the best place for this because it's so easy to get out of town and drive to different deserts — the sand dunes of Abu Dhabi or the rocky deserts of Oman.

Otherwise I'm off on field trips in Ethiopia or I take myself away for a few days to concentrate on writing papers or grant proposals. I do field work with my postdocs and I travel with them too, which also helps strengthen our bond over their work. It's one of the things I love about being here — when I was in my former role in New York I'd have to spend at least two months in the field to make it worth my while. Now I can go to Ethiopia to do some field work over the course of a weekend, and be back on campus a few days later.

I'm most productive later in the day, so I tend to work late, but when I'm finished on campus, Abu Dhabi is a great place to hang out. You don't need to go far — one of my favorite places to go at the end of the day is Saadiyat Beach. Only five minutes from campus, it has some stunning beach bars, and with a cocktail or a glass of wine in hand, watching the sun set over the Arabian Gulf is the perfect way to end the day.



“I love teaching at NYU Abu Dhabi and I very much enjoy the interdisciplinary nature of our courses.”

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