



OLIVE TREE INITIATIVE

BEYOND SOUND-BITES AND STEREOTYPES

Dear UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement,

For the past decade, the Olive Tree Initiative has promoted open discourse to gain a better understanding of “the other” through academic curricula, leadership development, and experiential education trips to the Middle East and other conflict regions. Due to steadfast support from individuals and organizations like the UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement, we have equipped 700 students with the training and experiences needed to better understand, navigate and resolve conflicts in a manner that promotes inclusivity of a plurality of narratives. Together, we continue to prove the importance of open and meaningful discourse.

The Valuing Open and Inclusive Conversation and Engagement (VOICE) Grant supported the Olive Tree Initiative’s Annual Student Leadership Retreat. Here are highlights from the weekend of February 15-17, 2020:

- Gathered 65 OTI students, alumni, and faculty from across eight university campuses in California and Wyoming for a three-day retreat and workshop series that promoted open dialogue and skill building in conflict resolution.
- Prepared 30 undergraduate student diplomats with the knowledge on and practice in cross-cultural dialogue and conflict analysis for a three-week immersive experiential education trip in Summer 2020 to Washington, D.C., New York City, Jordan, Israel, and the West Bank.
- Fostered dialogue on the importance of multi-faceted narratives in analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and other regional conflicts.
- Supported university chapter development through providing information and tools on chapter structure, funding, and recruitment of diverse and respectful student groups.
- Cultivated a community of active learners dedicated to providing a space on college campuses for students to move beyond sound bites and stereotypes to openly explore a diversity of narratives and share their own experiences.

The Olive Tree Initiative’s Annual Student Leadership retreat prepared university students to be responsible and respectful student diplomats in their Summer 2020 trip to the Middle East. While COVID-19 travel restrictions prevented student travel during the Summer, the Olive Tree Initiative transitioned to an online platform to engage students in open dialogue on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict through a six-week webinar series in June and July 2020. The Olive Tree Initiative is committed to continuing these online engagements for the foreseeable future to continue fostering inclusive narrative-based conflict analysis on college campuses.

Alongside the UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement, we aim to promote college students’ continued engagement with respectful and inclusive conversations through their education.

Sincerely,
The Olive Tree Initiative

