



**OLD DOMINION  
UNIVERSITY**

**Department of Communication and Theatre Arts**

## EVENTS FOCUS

October 6, 2019

# Students and Faculty Find Deep Connections in Film by Arab American Filmmaker

By Amy Matzke-Fawcett | Oct. 3, 2019



Susan Youssef's film *Marjoun & the Flying Headscarf* was shown at Old Dominion University. Photo David B. Hollingsworth/ODU

Filmmaker Susan Youssef didn't set out to be the filmmaker representing the Arab American female community. But her two feature-length films, and many short films and works, focus on just that: making films more about "issues than identity," she said.

That sentiment was expressed during a panel at Old Dominion University on contemporary representations of Arab Americans and Muslims in the U.S. media with Youssef, an Arab American writer and director; Dr. Kristian Petersen of Philosophy and Religious Studies; and Dr. Shadi Bayadsi of World Languages and Cultures to a packed room of students, faculty and community members last Friday.

One of a number of events centered around Youssef's work, more than 200 people attended the campus screening of her recent full-length feature, *Marjoun & the Flying Headscarf*, followed by a Q&A.

"Well over half the audience stayed for the Q&A, which was thoughtful and often highly personal for many of the

participants, who connected deeply with the film's challenging exploration of on the one hand, how systemic prejudice contributed to the dissolution of the teen Muslim American girl, Marjoun, - the film's protagonist - family, and on the other, the focus on the a teen girls grappling with her sexuality within a patriarchal and predatory society," said Dr. Avi Santo, chair of the Department of Communication and Theatre Arts, which organized Youssef's visit.

The panel discussed a number of issues, from how representations of Arabs and Muslims have changed from early film through the 1980s, then in a post-9/11 America - right up to current media, such as the recent remake of the Disney film *Aladdin* and Hulu series *Ramy*, a dramatic comedy about the son of Egyptian immigrants in New Jersey who feels pulled between his Muslim community, millennial friends and his relationship with God.

"Representations of Arab Americans and other underrepresented communities can fall into tropes, but there has also been a shift into the ideas of 'good Muslims' and 'bad Muslims' as portrayals," Peterson said. *Marjoun* also deals with these themes.

There is also the issue of burdens of representation, which Youssef feels strongly as a woman, a mother and a filmmaker working with her community, she said. *Marjoun & the Flying Headscarf* deals with issues of a Muslim American family, nationality and the high school experiences of its main character, which serves to step away from the one-dimensional Muslim characters sometimes seen in media, she said.

Youssef, who was a journalist and teacher in Beirut before becoming a filmmaker, also met with ODU film students to discuss filmmaking as a career.

The event was co-sponsored by the College of Arts and Letters, Honors College, Strome Entrepreneurial Center, Women's Center, Student Engagement & Enrollment Services, Department of English, Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies, Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, Department of Women's Studies, Department of World Languages and Cultures, Graduate Program in International Studies, Institute for the Humanities and the Institute for Jewish Studies & Interfaith Understanding.

The number co-sponsors across the university shows the "degree of investment in this conversation at Old Dominion University," Santo said.



Dr. Shadi Bayadsi, Susan Youssef, and Dr. Kristian Petersen at the recent panel discussion. Photo D'An Ball/ODU



## Hundreds Attend Screenings of *American Dreamer* at the Naro | By Joe Garvey, September 24, 2019



ODU Film students with *American Dreamer* actress Isabel Arraiza and Film Program director David Mallin after Arraiza's presentation.

Nearly 1,000 people turned out at the Naro for two screenings of *American Dreamer*, a dramatic thriller directed by and co-written by distinguished Old Dominion University alumnus Derrick Borte '91.

More than 25 ODU students worked on the Hollywood production, which opened in 12 cities across the United States this past weekend. It will be released broadly nationwide on Friday.

David Mallin, director of ODU's film program, said nearly 400 people attended Thursday's showing. The 500-seat theater appeared to be almost full for Saturday's screening. Approximately 70 people attended a VIP reception at Alkaline before Saturday's showing.

"Thanks, everyone for coming out," Borte said after Saturday's screening. "This is kind of awesome for me."

*American Dreamer* is a character-driven movie set in the urban jungle of a mid-sized East Coast city. When a down-on-his-luck rideshare driver, who makes extra cash chauffeuring a low-level drug dealer, finds himself in a serious financial bind, he decides to kidnap the dealer's child. Filming took place on ODU's campus and throughout Hampton Roads.

The Screen Actors Guild diversity film, which stars Jim Gaffigan, Robbie Jones, Isabel Arraiza and Tammy Blanchard, had its world premiere at the Los Angeles Film Festival in 2018.

Borte, who grew up in Norfolk and Virginia Beach and attended First Colonial High School, graduated from ODU with a bachelor's in fine arts. Working with the Virginia Film Office (VFO) and Old Dominion University, he made *American Dreamer* with the support of film students from ODU's College of Arts and Letters. Students received credit for two six-credit internships for their participation in the production.

Borte credited Andy Edmunds of the VFO with the idea for a Workforce Development Initiative, which allowed for a higher tax rebate from the state.

"I've been trying to bring a film here to the state of Virginia for 12 years," said Borte, who participated in a Q&A after Saturday's screening with Mallin, Arraiza and co-writer Danny Forte. "And I've lost out to other states that had better tax incentives."

Mallin said this project was an outgrowth of ODU's efforts to develop professional partnerships.

"We wanted to do something bigger," he said. "Derrick and I had been talking about this idea for quite a while. ... And when the tax incentives came, that was a major incentive to see that this is the right project. We really thank the Virginia Film Office for that."

He added that ODU had a sound stage, production offices and other things that helped the film attain a production value "that looks like it cost a lot more than we actually spent."

It also had something that proved to be fortuitous. The house where the drug dealer and his girlfriend lived had been purchased by ODU to knock down to make way for Kornblau Field at S.B. Ballard Stadium.

"It was just sitting empty and ODU owned it," Mallin said. "We shot inside that house and now that house is no longer there."

Arraiza, who gave presentations to ODU students on Friday, discussed Gaffigan's performance. The dramatic role was a departure from his comedic roots. "It took me by surprise, it took me a minute to think 'Oh my God, he can be this dark,'" she said. "Then the minute they yell, 'Cut,' he's joking about Hot Pockets."

Edmunds has touted educational and economic benefits of the collaboration for the state, and Alonzo Brandon, ODU's vice president of university advancement, cited donors' role in making the initiative a reality.

*American Dreamer* is available on iTunes. The extras include a 30-minute video about the production. Mallin shot and directed most of the interviews that are much of the backbone of the story, and there is a section that talks specifically about the ODU partnership. It's also on Amazon and Hulu.

So could Hampton Roads be the backdrop for another film directed by Borte? "I think that the crew here is world class and the locations are amazing," he said. "I would love to make another film here - or more."

# ODU Theatre Hosts World Premiere of *HOMEsick* | By Helene Clehr, Oct. 3, 2019



Jaida Hall in *HOMEsick*.  
Photo Meredith Magoun/ODU

The Theatre Program will host the world premiere of *HOMEsick* from October 10-20. Written and directed by Deborah Wallace, an ODU alumna, Literary Festival speaker, and Emmy nominee, *HOMEsick* explores the myth of the American Dream: Fourteen pioneers on a wagon train heading west are in search of a new life, and, instead, they find betrayal. This past being prologue, we fast-forward to the present day, where politicians travel the campaign trail, immigrants journey towards our border, addicts trip into opioid dreams. People still search for a place to call Home, and betrayal still awaits around every corner; the Promised Land still elusive. *HOMEsick* is an intimate and revealing look at what we, as a nation, are really searching for, and where we are headed. What is the American Dream, and what if it's reduced to a cautionary parable?

*HOMEsick* will be performed onstage in the Goode Theatre (Monarch Way & 46th) Oct 10-12 and 16-19 at 7:30 pm, and on Oct 20 at 2:00 pm. Tickets are free (with code **THEAFAC20**) for ODU COMMS department faculty and \$5 for ODU students through [ODUArtsTix](#).

Ms. Wallace will also be presenting at the Literary Festival on Tues, Oct 8 at 1:00 pm in the University Theatre. This event is produced by ODURep, in partnership with the 2019 ODU Literary Festival, and with the generous support of the Hellenic Studies Endowment.

# OCTOBER

**10/07.** PURS grant applications due to Dean. Drafts were due to Avi by September 25.

**10/10-10-20.** Theatre Program puts on *HOMEsick*, written and directed by Deborah Wallace (Goode Theatre, Shows start at 7:30 PM except October 20 matinee at 2:00 PM; no shows October 13-15). Tickets are free (with code) for ODU COMM department faculty; \$5 for ODU students.

**10/15.** Materials due to P&T committee for lecturers seeking promotion.

**10/15.** Summer Research Fellowship Program materials due to Avi prior to submission to Dean's Office. Packets due to Dean by October 25.

**10/18.** Faculty meeting (2-4 PM BAL 9024) with Happy Hour to follow at Elesian. Happy Hour open to all.

**10/18.** A representative from ODU Counseling Services will be coming to our department to provide info on how faculty can direct students to get help. They will also be at the November 6 Adjunct Conversation (12:30-1:30 PM, BAL 9024), but if adjuncts cannot attend the November meeting then they are welcome to come to the first 30-minutes of the October 18 meeting

**10/24.** COMM ePortfolio Faculty Teaching Workshop. 11am-1pm, BAL 9002. RSVP by Tuesday 10/8.

**10/25.** Performance by MX.Oops at 12:30-1:25 PM in Diehn 1202. To register, contact Helene at [hclehr@odu.edu](mailto:hclehr@odu.edu).

**10/31.** Brown Bag Series. Thursday, October 31st from 12:30-1:30 PM in BAL 9024. **PRIYA VASHIST** and **TED GOURNELOS** will be presenting. Topics to come soon.

# KUDOS

Adjunct instructor **CRYSTAL NOLEN** will be playing Sister Douglass in James Baldwin's *The Amen Corner* at the newest Black Box theater in Norfolk's Military Circle Mall. Leslie Rainey is directing this ensemble, and the play will celebrate the Grand Opening of #1SPACE.

**JAMES MORROW** was interviewed for a juried show, Harvest Chicago Contemporary Dance Festival, that took place September 27/28 in Chicago:

As a festival veteran, James Morrow—b-boy and choreographer who began his career by stumbling in on a modern dance class at Southeastern Illinois University—is excited to return to HCCDF to celebrate such a big milestone. "What I love about the festival is that it is very eclectic, because there are so many different styles and genres represented. The fact that Melissa and Nicole are able to curate such a diverse show with national and international artists is such an important part of the Chicago dance scene that's been missing," said Morrow in an interview.

Morrow will be showing "We Don't Dig Holes to Bury Ourselves," a solo that "explores the cringeworthy justifications of war." The piece comes from Morrow's personal and visceral memory of 9/11 and its aftermath, the way the tragic event is permeated into the bodies of those who were alive to witness it, and the relationship that today's generation has with the event. "The first time I performed this piece was after 9/11...and I remember how surreal it felt watching the second tower go down. I teach at a university and many of the students don't really have a reference to it except for Google. There's a part of me that felt the need to bring it back," Morrow explained. As someone who was first introduced to dance at 10 years old through b-boying and Chicago's house scene, Morrow's work explores house dance and modern/contemporary techniques in his work as a spiritual experience. Morrow goes on, "Street dance doesn't get the recognition it deserves. Watching [artists like] Ron K. Brown's 'Grace' in New York...gave me permission, it empowered me, to use the vernacular that I grew up doing, and put it on the concert stage."

Please share accomplishments such as publications, awards, conference and festival acceptances, reviews, and other recognitions, and we will publish them in future bulletins: [Submit content here.](#)

A big **THANK YOU** to Tom & Diana Socha for hosting the Department party in September. The food, weather, company, and Atumpun Entertainment were all wonderful!

## BROWN BAG SERIES / OCT 31

Our Brown Bag series continues, where our faculty present works in progress to their colleagues for the purposes of A) sharing their research, B) generating conversation, and C) building community.

Presenters at the Brown Bag series offer short informal 10-12-minute presentations of ongoing projects and then we open the floor up to questions. This is a great way to learn about what colleagues and professors in other parts of the department are doing.

We always look to pair a person on the COMM side with an artist on the DANCE/FILM/THEATRE side. All are welcome (and we also provide a virtual option), including grad students (and select undergrads if the presenter wants them there).

Our second Brown Bag will be on Thursday, October 31st from 12:30-1:30 PM in BAL 9024. **PRIYA VASHIST** and **TED GOURNELOS** will be presenting. Topics to come soon.



## FACULTY CODE OF CONDUCT

Please take some time to review the new proposed **Faculty Code of Conduct** on the Faculty Senate's agenda. While it does promote ethical conduct, this proposal might also raise concerns about disciplinary actions and overreach when it comes to defining appropriate conduct. Provide your insights to Avi so he can bring these perspectives to the Faculty Senate.

# WELCOME

## Our New Fiscal Tech



We'd like to introduce you to **CHRISTINA JOHNSON**, the Department of Communication & Theatre Arts' new fiscal technician. Ms. Johnson comes to us from the School of Dental Hygiene at ODU, where she was the assistant to the Chair. She has experience in payroll processing and with Banner

and prior to joining our institution, a background in accounts receivable work for the healthcare industry. We are confident she will be an amazing addition to our department.

Christina will be undergoing trainings over the next few weeks, which are mandatory for her to gain access to some of the financial systems we regularly use, and it will take up to a month for her PCard to be activated, so even though we now have a fiscal technician in place, Christina will not be operating at full strength for a while longer. Stop by and introduce yourself!

## YOU'RE INVITED

### FALL 2019 COMM EPORTFOLIO FACULTY TEACHING WORKSHOP



GUEST PRESENTERS!  
FOOD!  
CONVERSATION

OCTOBER 24TH  
11:00 AM - 1:00 PM  
BAL 9002

RSVP BY 10/8

Please let us know of any dietary restrictions.  
Lunch and a participation stipend will be provided.

DANIELLE JACKSON  
DJACKSO@ODU.EDU

ALISON LIETZENMAYER  
ALIZEN@ODU.EDU

<https://www.commeportfolioodu.org/>

# upcoming events

## **HOME***sick*

A world premiere, written and directed by  
Deborah Wallace

Produced by ODURep in conjunction with ODU's Literary Festival

Produced with generous support from the Hellenic Studies Endowment



**ODUArtsTix.com**  
**Goode Theatre, Oct 10-20**

The Department of Communication & Theatre Arts presents:

# ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE: MX. OOPS

Date: October 24, 2019

Time: 12:30-1:25 pm

Place: Diehn 1202

All are welcome, but space is limited.

To register contact: [hclehr@odu.edu](mailto:hclehr@odu.edu)



**Mx. Oops** teaches at the City University of New York's Lehman College, in the Dance and Multimedia Performing Arts Programs. They are a transmedia artist with a focus on multimedia performance, urban dance, and queer mysticism. Their work blends dance, video design, costume, and rap.



They have toured the United States, Kenya, Burkina Faso, China, Russia, Austria, and the Netherlands; their works have been seen in NYC's HERE Arts Center, Santos Party House, The Box, Dixon Place, Joyce Soho, BAAD, and Harlem Stage. As a member of the HOWDOYOUSAYYAMINAFRICAN? Collective, they have presented in the Whitney Biennial, at the Witte de Witte Contemporary Art Center (Rotterdam), and Art Basel Miami.

# fall dance concert



NOV 13-15 | 7:30 PM  
NOV 16 | 2:00 and 7:30 PM

University Theatre  
[ODUArtsTix.com](http://ODUArtsTix.com)



**OLD DOMINION**  
UNIVERSITY

**BROWN BAG**  
**WORKS-IN-PROGRESS**  
**LUNCH SERIES**



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**09/24: Brittany Harris, MFA and Dr. Annemarie Navar-Gill (University Theatre 1002)**

**10/31: Priya Vashist, MFA and Dr. Ted Gournelos (BAL 9024)**

**11/26: Marilyn Marloff, MFA and Dr. Victoria Jennings (Diehn 1202)**

**01/30: Dr. Brendan O'Hallarn and Dr. Danielle Jackson (BAL 9024)**

**02/27: Jim Lyden, MFA and Dr. Fran Hassencahl (University Theatre 1002)**

**03/26: Dr. Carolina Conte and TBA (Diehn 1202)**

**04/23: Dr. Kyle Nicholas and Carla Harrell (BAL 9024)**