

BrandeisNOW

Brandeis teams selected for Davis Peace Prize

Two projects receive \$10k each to pursue international initiatives for peace



By Leah Burrows

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Two projects from Brandeis University have received a \$10,000 Projects for Peace grant funded by the **Davis United World College Scholars Program** for designing international initiatives that foster understanding, provide opportunity and promote peace.

Grant recipients are Abie Troen '14 and Andrea Verdeja '14 for their project, "A Call for Dignity: Ending Manual Scavenging" in Dewas, Madhya Pradesh, India" and Catie Stewart '16 and Eli Philip '15 for "Brandeis University - Al Quds University Student Dialogue Initiative."

Projects for Peace grants have been given out annually since 2007 in honor of philanthropist Kathryn W. Davis.

Troen and Verdeja are filming a documentary in India about manual scavenging, the caste-based practice of cleaning toilets by hand and transporting the waste, performed mostly by Hindu and Muslim Dalit (Untouchable) women. Troen and Verdeja are partnering with a local, grassroots organization called Jan Sahas to conduct interviews with current and former manual scavengers.

"What makes the work of this grassroots organization so powerful is that women who have broken free from the practice form a support system to help other manual scavengers break away from the cycle," says Verdeja. "We hope this this will help spread the word of the important work that these women are doing to empower their communities."

The documentary will help raise awareness about manual scavenging and how it is being combated, says Troen.

"Outside of India, and even within, not many people know that this practice is still taking place. These are human rights violations that need to be properly addressed, and that begins with spreading awareness about this story," says Troen.

Stewart and Philip are traveling to Israel to connect six to eight Brandeis students in Jerusalem with Palestinian students from Al Quds University.

"The general goal and idea is to build personal connections between students on our campus and students at Al Quds," says Philip. "When you have that personal connection and knowledge of other people's lives, you can have dialogue and real conversation about live issues."

"We want to find a way to have dialogue between Brandeis students and Al Quds students in a way that empowers moderate students on both campuses," says Stewart.

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