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## Visiting Professors Make Journey a Family Affair

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – It is a brisk morning on the Illinois Wesleyan University campus. Two professors, Saloua Zerhouni and Driss Maghraoui, prepare for classes in an office on the first floor of the Center for Liberal Arts Building on Beecher Street.

“Is it usually this cold this time of year?” asks Zerhouni, the Fulbright Visiting Professor this fall at Illinois Wesleyan (link:

[http://www.iwu.edu/CurrentNews/newsreleases09/fac\\_FulbrightZerhouni\\_00909.shtml](http://www.iwu.edu/CurrentNews/newsreleases09/fac_FulbrightZerhouni_00909.shtml)).

Zerhouni’s husband, Maghraoui, smiles.

The weather today is colder than the mild temperature you could find this time of the year in Morocco, where Zerhouni and Maghraoui teach. She is an assistant professor of political science at the public Mohammed V University, Souissi, in Rabat; and he is an assistant professor of history at the private Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane. They are teaching this semester at Illinois Wesleyan with the help of a grant from the Fulbright Visiting Scholar Program. Though they have both worked in the United States before, this time is different.

The couple, who have been married since 2000, brought more than their academic expertise to Bloomington. They brought their family – Adam, age 7; Ayoub, age 4; and 11-month-old Nouha – in the hopes of creating a greater cultural understanding.

“It is one thing to live and work abroad when you are by yourself. It is a whole new adventure to do that with your family,” said Maghraoui, who has taught and studied at U.S. institutions over the last 20 years, such as the University of California at Santa Cruz, where he earned his master’s and doctorate in history, and Yale University, where he was a visiting assistant professor in 2004. “It can be a challenge, but a worthwhile one,” agreed Zerhouni, a graduate of the University of Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdallah in Fez, Morocco, who worked for the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. in 2000.

Along with preparing for classes at Illinois Wesleyan – Zerhouni is teaching “Women, Gender and Politics in North Africa,” and “The History of the Arab World” and Maghraoui is

teaching “North Africa: History, Islam and Politics” – the couple had to locate schools and day care for their three children, none of whom spoke English before they arrived.

Adam, their oldest, is the only one attending public school. Zerhouni says her son is understanding more and more, and is now less shy about talking in class. “He came home the first week and asked me, ‘Mamma, what is this “Oh my gosh!” that people keep saying?’ I explained it to him, and now it is one of his favorite phrases,” she said, laughing.

Adam was born in Germany when the couple worked in Berlin from 2001 to 2003. Zerhouni was a researcher for the German Institute for International Security and Maghraoui was doing research at the Center for Modern Oriental Studies. The family left Germany in 2003 and returned to Morocco, where Adam was raised and Ayoub and Nouha were born. The languages the children speak are Arabic and French. These days, a phrase often heard in their house is, “How do you say that in English?” according to Maghraoui.

While here, the couple has conquered new adventures, from navigating mass supermarkets looking for organic produce to being the only family on the block to fast during the holy month of Ramadan. Even with the challenges, Zerhouni and Maghraoui said there was really no question about whether or not to bring the children along with them when they came to Illinois. They both saw the journey as a great opportunity. “While it is important to be attached to your religion and culture, it is equally important to open yourself up to new cultures and ideas,” said Maghraoui. “I want my children to live in other societies and to learn to be open to other cultures and respect other religious experiences.” When the couple returns to Morocco, they said their children will bring back not only great memories, but also a better understanding of U.S. culture.

The professors said they hope for the same type of growth on a professional level, and have not been disappointed. “This time has been about a cross-cultural exchange of knowledge,” said Zerhouni, who added she has been excited to speak about the roles women play in Morocco and in Islam. While at Wesleyan Zerhouni and Maghraoui have contributed to different intellectual and cultural activities, including the organization of a lecture series on Muslim Politics and the Politics of Islam, and giving talks for the Illinois Wesleyan Political Science and History departments, as well as departments at Illinois State University.

Zerhouni, in particular, noted working in the “Anglo-Saxon” or U.S. model of teaching has great benefits. “The Moroccan system of higher education is based upon the French system, which has some good qualities but is relatively very rigid,” said Zerhouni. Morocco’s modern educational system grew out of the colonial ties to the French government, which ruled Morocco during the unpopular Protectorate from 1912-1956. Higher education was initially meant as a

means to train students for government jobs. “It is a lot of memorization and recitation,” said Zerhouni, who adds with a smile, “a bit like spoon-feeding education. We need to push for individual initiatives.”

With the slow down in government hiring, the nation is facing a crisis of having many highly educated people unemployed, said Maghraoui. “The U.S. system of education is much more flexible, and forces students to be more creative and adaptive,” he said.

“When we are back in Morocco, I will try to encourage my university to introduce some of the positive aspects of the U.S. educational model, with more readings and more student responsibility,” said Zerhouni. Both professors said their perspective institutions are interested in developing long-term connections with Illinois Wesleyan. “Our deans and administrators are looking for ways to forge these international ties,” she said.

Before their short few months in Illinois ends, Zerhouni and Maghraoui plan to pack in as much as they can. The couple organized a lecture series titled “Muslim Politics and the politics of Islam,” with the support of the International Studies Program and the departments of History, Religion and Political Science. “This is an amazing place for intellectual growth,” said Zerhouni, who spoke for the lecture series along with Maghraoui. The couple also joined African Culture Week activities in November. Along with his Illinois Wesleyan class, Maghraoui has been lecturing at other universities during his time in the U.S., including speaking at Cornell University, the University of New Orleans and at the Middle East Studies Association annual meeting held in Boston this year.

When they do return to Morocco, they say it is the people that will stay in their memories. “More than the buildings or the technology, it is the people that make a place worth while,” said Maghraoui. “We have met many amazing, kind and intelligent people here at Illinois Wesleyan.”

Zerhouni added, “We hope we are developing long friendships, for our institutions and ourselves.”