



Students From Northwestern University In Qatar Study Dual Identity In The United Kingdom

Two Northwestern University in Qatar will have the opportunity this summer to further their research thanks to grants provided by the university. Northwestern's Office for Undergraduate Research and the Buffet Institute have provided Basmah Azmi and Meher Matab financial support to fund their research project on Pakistani identity, which will be conducted in London.

Mehtab and Azmi, students in NU-Q's journalism program, plan to use the grants to research the cultural assimilation of Pakistani migrants in the United Kingdom and its implications on identity.

"Northwestern considers research skills to be an important part of its students' academic education," said Everette E. Dennis, dean and CEO, "to support these initiatives we are committed to assisting students in connecting them to the resources necessary to follow their research interests."

The grants will allow Mehtab and Azmi to travel to Great Britain to conduct qualitative-research on generations of British-Pakistanis who have lived in the UK since the country's separation from India in 1945.

Research opportunities that are available to Northwestern students in Evanston are also offered to NU-Q students, which was revealed to the two students following a meeting with the director of undergraduate research who visited Doha earlier this year.

"We realized at that meeting that all the opportunities that are available to the students in Evanston are available to us," Mehtab said. Their research process started with the simple idea of identity and its fluid nature. The students say that they were fascinated by the very concept of how strong cultural identity can be for diaspora.

"We found that Pakistanis who migrated right after the India-Pakistan partition and had no real sense about Pakistan as a country, would clearly identify themselves as British-Pakistanis," Mehtab said. "We wanted to understand what it meant to be British-Pakistani," she said.

Mehtab and Azmi say that their curiosity about cultural assimilation stems from the current European migrant crisis. "We are curious about what it means to hold on to two cultural identities at the same time," Azmi said.

The students competed with 322 applications for the grant from the undergraduate research office and attributed their success to the guidance they received from NU-Q faculty Ibrahim Abusharif and Christopher Sparshott. "They asked us questions that helped us think deeply about how our experiences and knowledge could give us an edge in the competition," Azmi said.

Meher and Azmi are Pakistani and speak Urdu, which will allow them to conduct the oral-history project in the local language, which they consider to be most comfortable for their subjects. "Cultural assimilation can't be based on or statistics or facts you find in a book, it's an experience -- and we want to study and present it as that," Mehtab said.

Mehtab and Azmi will spend two-months conducting interviews and capturing the everyday experiences of British-Pakistanis; their findings will be presented on an interactive website when they complete their research.

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