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### Hill People

#### Debora Johnson-Ross - Cool Enough for School



This popular culture researcher examines how the African concept of "cool" has been transformed in American culture.



### Language professor wins prestigious teaching award

*Ira Zepp & Mohamed Esa*  
Associate Professor of Foreign Languages Mohamed Esa

received the Distinguished Teaching Award April 29 at McDaniel College's Honors Convocation.



The annual award and \$10,000 prize recognize inspired classroom work and dedication to students and honors the beloved emeritus faculty member Ira G. Zepp, who taught full time in the department of Religious Studies for more than 30 years.

Esa, who joined the faculty in 1994, enriches the campus community with his multicultural perspective. A Palestinian with dual Israeli and American citizenship, he earned his Ph.D. at the University of Heidelberg and is fluent in four languages, including Arabic and Hebrew. He teaches at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

For Esa, the sizable check will fund exploratory travel to such countries as Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia in preparation for lectures or future January Term study tours. "I want to continue to explore ways to build better and stronger bridges between the U.S. and the Arab and Muslim world," says Esa.

The quintessential people person, Esa hosts numerous cultural appreciation events each year, including the popular Taste of Islam dinner, German-American Day and concerts by internationally renowned Arabic musician Simon Shaheen. As advisor to the Multicultural Students Association, the German Club and the German House, a language immersion residence, Esa often

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invites groups of students for festive meals at his off-campus home, where he and his wife, Andrea, cook up authentic sauerbraten or kufta, depending on the holiday.

Frequent field trips to Washington, D.C., often in the family minivan, further broaden students' worldview and history with visits to the embassies of Germany, Austria and Switzerland as well as the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. His work with German rock music in the classroom truly has students relating their language skills with popular culture too. Also, his mastery of technology as a learning tool serves as a model for his digital-savvy students.

Esa has led January Term study trips to Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and central Europe. In March he led a group of 16 students and 11 community members on a 10-day study tour of Egypt introducing participants to Muslim traditions and culture.

The Maryland Foreign Language Association has recognized Esa's skill at building cultural bridges by naming him president (2004-2006) of its professional association of language teachers. His lengthy list of outreach activities ranging from last summer's Fulbright German Studies Seminar on Muslim minorities to professional workshops on German proverbs and idioms to stereotyping Arabs in Hollywood films presented at the local public library have earned him a reputation beyond the U.S. borders - and an invitation to Stockholm this fall to present to Scandinavian German teachers.



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