Lauren Roth

Public/Confidential Statement:

I arrived in Israel naively seeking definitive answers. I sought to analyze the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a means to affirm my own opinion on the matter and look towards a solution. I truly believed that following my semester at Tel Aviv University, I would have found the answers to all of my questions that I found necessary to thrive as a leader. Little did I realize how facile and static my understanding of leadership was at that time.

Through class field trips and program excursions, I was able to visit many different areas throughout the country. I was able to experience the diverse geography of the land while learning about the cultural and historical relevance deeply embedded in the land. I went on countless hikes in both northern and southern Israel, a jeep trek through the desert, attended arts and cultural events, ate delicious regional food, and had intellectual and engaging conversations with fellow students and locals every single day. There was hardly a moment when I wasn’t learning or experiencing something new, and with every experience grew more curiosity.

I had the opportunity to engage with a variety of different leaders throughout the country both in and out of the classroom. I was lucky enough to see Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speak on two separate occasions, learn from a professor who engages with leaders in peace talks, meet with an expert on regional strategic planning and Palestinian negotiations, as well as engaged with leaders in the rapidly growing entrepreneurial field in Tel Aviv.

In studying the approaches that both current and past leaders have taken in finding a solution to the conflict, I saw incredible strides of confidence and exemplary leadership as well as more cowardly approaches, plagued by strategic political games. I began to understand the
profound complexity in the decision-making processes faced by these leaders. I found starkly contrasting opinions between some leaders, and surprisingly similar desires between others, despite their political ties. I learned of brave leaders, risking their careers for peace. I’ve witnessed unreasoned hate, on both sides of the argument. I’ve learned of great strides in the direction of peace that were, unfortunately, only to be met with a retraction. I analyzed the flaws and successes of these leaders, and realized that having authority does not mean knowing the answer to every question. Rather, having authority is a dynamic role of continual learning and development.

Reflecting on my incredible journey, I realize how naïve I was entering the program. I thought that spending a semester in Israel would help me find the answers I needed to prevail as a leader. However, I left with an understanding much greater than I could have anticipated; leadership is less about pinpointing a definitive answer as much as it is a dynamic process of growth, development, and eagerness to continue learning and asking questions.