



University of Missouri Chapter
<http://aaup.missouri.edu>

President

Eddie Adelstein (adelsteine@health.missouri.edu)

Vice Presidents

Victoria Johnson (johnsonvi@missouri.edu)

Stephen Montgomery-Smith (stephen@math.missouri.edu)

August 4, 2009

U.S. Embassy, London

Dear Special Consular Services,

The MU chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) is very concerned about the circumstances of an MU graduate student. We ask for your help.

You have likely heard about the plight of Zaid Mahir. Mr. Mahir has been living in the United States with a student visa since 2004, pursuing his Ph.D. in Arabic and the American contemporary novel. Since Mr. Mahir was previously a professor in Baghdad, he entered the University of Missouri as senior-level nontraditional student. For this reason, he has expanded duties at the University of Missouri and is crucial to the support of the Arabic program. He not only is an important translator of Arabic literature into English but is also the only teacher in the Arabic language program at the University of Missouri. In October 2008, Mr. Mahir received an invitation to present at a symposium at Oxford University in England. Oxford University is an internationally prestigious university, to be asked to present there is an honor for anyone, especially a graduate student.

Prior to his departure, Mr. Mahir was told by the US Embassy that his passport was valid and that he could proceed with the paper work once he arrived in London. Once he arrived in London, however, the US Embassy reversed its previous statement and told Mr. Mahir that although his paper work was complete, his passport was not valid and that he needed to have a new passport issued for him by the Iraqi Embassy in London. Some embassy officials have even stated that he should return to Iraq for a new passport. Given that Mr. Mahir fled Iraq during the war at great risk to his personal safety, he would be putting himself in danger to return. Meanwhile, his pregnant wife and two children have been waiting at home for four months for his return. He needs to return immediately to resume his normal life in Columbia, Missouri, and to continue the Arabic language program at MU. Mr. Mahir's classes in English and in Arabic are filled to capacity. His continued absence is not only painful for his family, but in our view it harms both the scholarly and teaching missions of the University of Missouri. Since classes are starting soon, his absence will not only have an adverse affect on the students who are already signed up for his Arabic course in the Fall, but also on MU, which may have to close its Arabic language program altogether.

We request that the London U.S. Embassy issue Mr. Mahir a visa. The British Embassy recognizes the validity of the S-series Iraqi passport--- so should the US Embassy. The Iraqi Embassy has also written a letter of support and forwarded it to the US Embassy. The invalidation of the S-Series passports has led to a bureaucratic nightmare for stranded Iraqis throughout the world.

Delays in visa application processing, commonly of many months, have plagued universities since 2001. Many foreign researchers and students have been unable to take U.S. posts or enroll in U.S. doctoral

programs because they could not count on being able to get a visa by the start of the academic year. The national office of the AAUP in Washington DC has urged the government to speed up the process, warning that the delays were alienating foreign researchers, damaging the United States' reputation abroad, and depriving U.S. institutions of a workforce upon which they depend.

Our universities, like our country, are known for ideological inclusion, not exclusion. Any type of exclusion of foreign scholars skews and impoverishes academic and political debate inside the United States.

Sincerely,

Dr. Victoria Johnson, MU-AAUP chapter
On behalf of the MU-AAUP Executive Committee
aaup.missouri.edu