

UMd. student receives Gildenhorn Scholarship

by Ian Zelaya
Staff Writer

University of Maryland's Joseph and Alma Gildenhorn Institute for Israel Studies recently awarded junior Michelle Thomas with its first Gildenhorn Family Scholarship in recognition of her pursuit of an Israel Studies minor. The institute plans to offer the scholarship every fall semester.

Thomas, a double major in biochemistry and physiology and neurology, was originally a religious studies minor and said she first became interested in Israel when she took an elective about politics and religion about the country. She said

"As I've never been to Israel before, I am thrilled for my first trip," Thomas said. "Of course I'm excited to see Jerusalem, to visit the Western Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Dome of the Rock. I think it is remarkable how much biblical history lives in the state of Israel and I truly cannot wait to see it all in person." She also noted she looks forward to practicing Hebrew with native speakers. In the future, Thomas said she'd love to combine her two interests of science and Israel so she can enjoy them both in her future career.

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her lecturer, professor Joseph Ringel, was fantastic and expanded her interest from theology to Israel and its culture and people.

For the class, she wrote an essay about civil development in Israel, its relationship with traditional religion and how other groups view its future. She adapted the paper to the online scholarship application that requires an essay and an optional letter of recommendation from a professor. Paul Scham, a UMd. professor and the executive director of the Gildenhorn Institute, says Thomas, one of his former students, was chosen because of her excellent essay and academic record. Thomas will be spending spring semester in Haifa, taking courses as part of the university's Maryland-in Haifa program.

The Gildenhorn Institute was established in 2006 as a means of presenting courses and programs related to all aspects of Israel and its relations with other Middle Eastern countries. It offers 15 courses a year that are taken by about 500 students, Scham said.

"The goal of the institute is to increase awareness of Israel in an absolutely nonpartisan way," Scham said. "We have a lot of Muslim and Arab students who take our courses because we've cultivated and have a reputation of offering balanced views on the Israeli-Palestine conflict. I think we've developed a reputation for fairness." ■

For more information about the Gildenhorn Institute and its programs, go to israelstudies.umd.edu.