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**Media Advisory/News Release**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**CONTROVERSIAL TWO-DAY ACADEMIC COLLOQUIUM AT ROGER WILLIAMS  
UNIVERSITY TO TARGET THE “ARAB PERSPECTIVE” ON INTELLECTUAL  
FREEDOM AND MEDIA INDEPENDENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

**Al Jazeera Correspondent Josh Rushing and CNBC Arabiya Chairman Zafar Siddiqi  
keynote forums featuring world renowned thought leaders,  
victims and monitoring agencies**

**Editors note: This “by invitation only” forum is open to the media and will be streamed live at  
<mms://streamer.rwu.edu/rwulive>**

**BRISTOL, R.I., April 7, 2008** - For centuries, intellectuals, artists and writers in the Middle East have been arrested, tortured and killed for what they taught, created or wrote. Media outlets are often bullied and controlled by their governments. In some countries, girls are denied an education. Academics ask the question: Can intellectual examination and thoughtful discussion bridge these cultural differences over what many consider “basic freedoms?” Where is the outrage when freedoms are denied? What does intellectual freedom really mean? How can differences be discussed without being judgmental? With more news media outlets opening in the Middle East, what does that mean for openness, access and truth?

On **April 16 and 17**, Roger Williams University will take the discussion of intellectual freedom to the next level bringing in an impressive line-up of international experts, advocates of intellectual freedom, victims, and Middle East news media icons. They will examine the cultural divide while also looking at shared beliefs and traditions. Their focus:

**Intellectual Freedom in the Middle East: Perspectives and Opportunities**

The speakers, representing both western and non-western perspectives will look at the abuses of intellectual freedom, its causes and other vexing questions that divide nations and lead

to wars. The solutions are as controversial as the problems. The “American Way” is not always the solution or an alternative for other countries. That is both an enigma and a flash point.

Roger Williams University President Dr. Roy Nirschel personally developed this upcoming two-day forum as the next step in promoting thoughtful, respectful discussion on the Middle East.

President Nirschel believes, “Roger Williams has built a reputation as a university that celebrates civil discourse and a global perspective—especially as it relates to the Islamic world. This colloquium will allow for journalists from the “Arab Street” to mingle their voices with representation from the U.S. Department of State, academics, activists and writers at risk. It should prove to be lively, thought-provoking and even controversial. But presenting perspectives—even those some find anathema—is an important part of a liberal arts education; particularly when done with civility, reason and respect.”

### **Some of the Outstanding Speakers**

Two of the speakers will focus on the powerful impact of the new Middle East-based 24-hour satellite TV news channels—Al Jazeera and CNBC Arabiya. Some critics accuse these outlets of being “anti-American.” Others say they provide the valuable “Arab perspective.”

- Controversial Al Jazeera Washington, D.C. correspondent **Josh Rushing** will be the forum’s keynote speaker on April 16 at 5:30 p.m. Mr. Rushing is often called “the face of Al Jazeera in America.” Others call him a “traitor” since he was once a veteran U.S. Marine captain and U.S military spokesman following the Iraq invasion in 2003. **While all events will be open to the news media, this is the only event that will be open to the public.**

- **Zafar Siddiqi**, the chairman of CNBC Arabiya, the Arab world’s first 24-hour satellite TV business channel, will keynote the conference on April 17 at noon. His Middle East-based network presents in-depth regional and international affairs coverage from an Arab economic perspective. Mr. Siddiqi says the network’s goal is to provide viewers with independent news and analysis that will help them make informed decisions.

- **Qussay Al-Attabi**, a young Iraqi scholar will discuss the Mahdi militia death threat that forced him to leave Baghdad University and Iraq last year. Roger Williams University helped rescue him. With assistance from Brown University, Mr. Al-Attabi is living in Rhode Island and is pursuing a doctorate in English at Brown.

- **Hala Taweel**, president of the University of the Middle East (UME) Project in Boston, is

a Palestinian who grew up under Israeli occupation. She saw friends killed and her mother arrested for speaking out. While attending Harvard University, she got to know and like Israelis. Along with others they launched the UME Project to create a system of connected educational centers in the Middle East promoting academic excellence, human dignity, open inquiry and peace in the region.

This upcoming forum continues the efforts Roger Williams University began seven years ago, taking on the role as a “convener,” a facilitator, to promote discussion on critical Middle East issues. The outstanding efforts have brought Roger Williams University national and international media attention:

- The 2003 *Initiative to Educate Afghan Women* was founded by Paula Nirschel, wife of Roger Williams University President Roy Nirschel. It has awarded 52 Afghan women four-year college scholarships to study in the United States. Their education prepares them to return home to rebuild Afghanistan.
- In 2004, the *New Land For Peace* symposium—the University hosted a two-day forum involving over 100 scholars, investors, professionals and students. They proposed various economic development projects to bring greater prosperity to the Middle East.
- In February 2005, Roger Williams University hosted the first Iraqi student group to visit the United States in 35 years. Over 10 days, the students visited a number of universities.
- In 2006, the *State Department Plus Program*—fourteen students, mostly from the Middle East, spent their junior and senior years here. Some will graduate this May.
- In September 2007, the University assisted in rescuing Qussay Al-Attabi, an Iraqi educator and translator. He fled Iraq following a death threat from the Mahdi militia. He will be one of the colloquium’s panelists.
- In summer 2008, 18 exemplary student leaders mostly from the Middle East, will come to Roger Williams University for six weeks as part of the *Middle East Partnership Initiative*. The participants will develop leadership and problem-solving skills.

### **Media Alert**

Except for Mr. Rushing’s keynote lecture on April 16, the colloquium is closed to the public. For tickets to Mr. Rushing’s event, the public should call (401) 254-3067. **Media are encouraged to cover any portion of the colloquium. For media who are planning to attend,**

**please contact Jennifer Sullivan in University Communications at (401) 254-3805 to inquire about media credentials.**

For a detailed media kit—including a schedule of events, biographies of speakers and downloadable photos—please visit: [http://www.rwu.edu/sites/middle\\_east/media\\_kit.htm](http://www.rwu.edu/sites/middle_east/media_kit.htm)

Roger Williams University is ranked by U.S. News & World Report as ninth among comprehensive colleges in the north. Roger Williams offers undergraduate and graduate programs in the arts and sciences, architecture, business, construction management, education, engineering, historic preservation, justice studies, legal studies, visual arts studies and law.

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