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Media Advisory/News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**ROGER WILLIAMS UNIVERSITY HOSTS CONTROVERSIAL TWO-DAY FORUM
ON INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM AND MEDIA INDEPENDENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

**Al Jazeera Correspondent Josh Rushing and CNBC Arabiya Chairman Zafar Siddiqi
bring the “Arab perspective” to the Middle East discussion**

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

BRISTOL, R.I., April 7, 2008 - Writers, artists, and intellectuals in the Middle East have been arrested, tortured and killed for what they have taught, created or written. It has been that way for centuries. Media outlets are often bullied and controlled by their governments. In some countries, girls are denied an education. The question is: how can the international community bridge these differences and understand better why these practices exist and are tolerated?

The solutions are as controversial as the problems. And the “American way” is not always the solution for other countries. A dynamic discussion of these timely issues from all sides will take center stage on **April 16 and 17** at Roger Williams University in Bristol, R.I. The unique two-day “by invitation only” event will bring together an impressive line-up of international experts, advocates of intellectual freedom, victims, and controversial Middle East news media leaders. They will examine the cultural divide to get a better understanding of what separates nations and what could bring them together. Their challenge:

Intellectual Freedom in the Middle East: Perspectives and Opportunities

This academic forum is the latest in a series of efforts Roger Williams University has undertaken to address centuries of misunderstandings and misperceptions involving the Middle

East. They will be tackling the region's most sensitive questions: What does intellectual freedom really mean? Why does it differ from country to country? Can opponents discuss differences without being judgmental? Does the rise of mass media outlets in the Middle East mean more freedoms and more balanced information?

Roger Williams University President Dr. Roy Nirschel personally developed this two-day event as the next step in the University's efforts to promote thoughtful discussion—globally—on the many issues that confound, confuse and corrupt the world's view of 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, even some former Middle East reporters, accuse these outlets of being "anti-American" while others say they are providing the valuable "Arab perspective" that is often missing in international coverage.

- 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 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.

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; and additional background information—visit:

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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