

## An Interview

# with Assad Fouladkar

By Myriam Sfeir

Mr. Assad Fouladkar is a full-time professor at the Lebanese American University. He has taught and supervised many LAU students majoring in film studies, so an interview with him was pertinent. He holds a masters degree from Boston University and has received his bachelor of arts from the Lebanese University.

**Myriam Sfeir:** What course do you teach at LAU?

**Assad Fouladkar:** I teach three technical courses namely Script Writing, T.V. production II, and Film Making. Script writing entails writing scripts for documentaries and fiction. In T.V production II we teach students how to make news reports and short documentaries. Last but not least the film making course tackles the fiction genre of shooting film drama.

**MS:** As an instructor of film do you promote documentaries or feature films that have to do with women's problems in the Arab World?

**AF:** Well I encourage my students to touch upon various subjects especially women's issues given that most of my students are female. Yet, in the final analysis the choice is theirs. Last year in one of my courses I conducted an awareness campaign where I invited a guest speaker to talk about violence against women. Most of my students became interested in the subject and chose the topic in question for their projects. They were very eager to commence and started off by doing their preliminary research. They met with religious and intellectual authorities as well as professionals who have worked extensively on this subject. Two of the projects submitted were good and were presented in the Beirut Documentary Film Festival that took place recently.

**MS:** You said that your students are predominantly female. Why is that?

**AF:** Well it is true, in all my classes female students exceed their male counterparts by far. In my opinion the reason behind this is that most parents require their male children to major in money generating fields such as business, medicine, etc. Hence, students are forced to fulfill their parent's wishes or else the latter will refuse to finance their education. For female students it is much easier to enroll in the Radio, T.V, Film department. A woman's ultimate aim according to her parents is to marry and generate babies not money. So parents, inclined to offer their daughter an education, really don't care what she majors in as long as she earns a degree. Besides, daughters who choose Radio, T.V., Film select it because they think it is an easy field that is

suitable for a girl. Once enrolled these girls are faced with difficulties for it is a very demanding field.

Here a difference is felt in the attitude of male and female students. Some of my female students are not serious about their work. On the other hand, given that some of my male students were originally enrolled in the Business School, or have fought hard to convince their parents to accept their choice of specialization, they tend to be more serious. I had a female student who upon getting engaged dropped all four courses she was taking. She didn't even bother to ask for a reimbursement for the courses she dropped. Because she was conditioned to believe that her ultimate goal is to land a husband once she found the candidate that fit the requirements, her degree was no longer important.

However, that does not mean that all my female students are nonchalant. On the contrary, a lot of females excel in film studies and the proof is that the two Lebanese feature films screened at the Beirut International Film Festival are directed by women (Randa Chahaal and Joanna Hajji Touma).

**MS:** Some observations about your students?

**AF:** Like Lebanese youth my students are confused and lost. From experience I realize that most of my students excel in the film making course because they are given a chance to escape from reality. They pour all their creativity into the project they are working on. This course enables them to expose their personal problems in a roundabout manner. However, when it comes to documentaries their performance is not as impressive. Yet, it is not always the case, this year one of my female students won an award in the Documentary Film Festival.

**MS:** How do they see their future in this industry?

**AF:** This generation, I believe, is very pessimistic and the future for them seems bleak. The topic that recurs in most of my student's works is that of escaping the country. All my students dream of leaving this country. Whenever I tell them that I lived abroad for around twelve years and willingly chose to return to Lebanon they are shocked. They can't fathom why I came back. I don't try to persuade them to stay for I am convinced that one has to go through the whole circle (fed up/travel, appreciate the country/come back) to learn to value and treasure the good things we have in this country. I have a lot of colleagues and students who left for a couple of years and then opted to come back.