

## SUNY New Paltz group teaches in Israel

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Rodriguez traveled to Israel a couple of weeks ago as part of a team of trauma experts, including members of the Institute for Disaster Mental Health at SUNY New Paltz.

There, in a land where political, psychological and physical trauma is as common as the desert heat, she met decidedly uncommon conditions: in training sessions that put Israeli and Palestinian mental health professionals in the same room with each other.

"I found things we take for granted here didn't apply over there," Rodriguez said.

Simple things, she said. Like taking a person's photograph.

"You had to ask. Some people wouldn't allow it, others were OK with it, but not if it was going on Facebook. It was »» different."



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The idea behind the group's three-day visit to Israel was to train professionals in what's called psychological first aid — the humane, supportive response to a serious crisis.

The goal was to equip Palestinians and Israelis in how to provide this type of aid. Those trainees, in turn, will train others in their communities to reduce stress, and thereby reduce violence.

If the social, political and cultural differences weren't apparent enough during the sessions, the gradations of those differences were surprising to Rodriguez and to the group's executive director, James Halpern.

"There are Arab-Israelis, Russian and Hebrew Israelis of course; Arab-speaking Israelis, Bedouin Arabs, Palestinians from different regions — it's so much more complicated than you can find in the news," Halpern said.

What they all have in common is what the institute is built to deal with: conflict. Just before the group left the

country, Rodriguez said they were presented with a vivid reminder of what they were up against by merely talking about alternatives to violence: A “peace group” had been pelted with rocks for their efforts.



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